THE · LITTLE COLONEL'S · HOLIDAYS

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by

ANNIE · FELLOWS JOHNSTON

Ruth W. Field
From
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December. 25, 1908

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L. C. PAGE & COMPANY

200 Summer Street Boston, Mass.

"AUNT CINDY DARTED AN ANGRY LOOK AT HER SWORN ENEMY."

(*See page 25*)

The Little Colonel's Holidays

By ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

Author of "The Little Colonel," "Two Little Knights of Kentucky," "The Story of Dago," "The Little Colonel's House Party," etc.

Illustrated by L. J. BRIDGMAN

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TO

"The Little Captain" and his sisters

WHOSE PROUDEST HERITAGE IS THAT

THEY BEAR THE NAME OF A

NATION'S HERO.

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THE LITTLE COLONEL'S
(Trade Mark)
HOLIDAYS.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAGIC KETTLE.

ONCE upon a time, so the story goes (you may read it for yourself in the dear old tales of Hans Christian Andersen), there was a prince who disguised himself as a swineherd. It was to gain admittance to a beautiful princess that he thus came in disguise to her father's palace, and to attract her attention he made a magic caldron, hung around with strings of silver bells. Whenever the water in the caldron boiled and bubbled, the bells rang a little tune to remind her of him.

"Oh, thou dear Augustine,
All is lost and gone,"

they sang. Such was the power of the magic kettle, that when the water bubbled hard enough to set the

bells a-tinkling, any one holding his hand in the steam could smell what was cooking in every kitchen in the kingdom.

It has been many a year since the swineherd's kettle was set a-boiling and its string of bells a-jingling to satisfy the curiosity of a princess, but a time has come for it to be used again. Not that anybody nowadays cares to know what his neighbour is going to have for dinner, but all the little princes and princesses in the kingdom want to know what happened next.

"What happened after the Little Colonel's house party?" they demand, and they send letters to the Valley by the score, asking "Did Betty go blind?" "Did the two little Knights of Kentucky ever meet Joyce again or find the Gate of the Giant Scissors?" Did the Little Colonel ever have any more good times at Locust, or did Eugenia ever forget that she too had started out to build a Road of the Loving Heart?

It would be impossible to answer all these questions through the post-office, so that is why the magic kettle has been dragged from its hiding-place after all these years, and set a-boiling once more. Gather in a ring around it, all you who want to know, and pass your curious fingers through its

wreaths of rising steam. Now you shall see the Little Colonel and her guests of the house party in turn, and the bells shall ring for each a different song.

But before they begin, for the sake of some who may happen to be in your midst for the first time, and do not know what it is all about, let the kettle give them a glimpse into the past, that they may be able to understand all that is about to be shown to you. Those who already know the story need not put their fingers into the steam, until the bells have rung this explanation in parenthesis.

(In Lloydsboro Valley stands an old Southern mansion, known as "Locust." The place is named for a long avenue of giant locust-trees stretching a quarter of a mile from house to entrance gate, in a great arch of green. Here for years an old Confederate colonel lived all alone save for the negro servants. His only child, Elizabeth, had married a Northern man against his wishes, and gone away. From that day he would not allow her name to be spoken in his presence. But she came back to the Valley when her little daughter Lloyd was five years old. People began calling the child the Little Colonel because she seemed to have inherited so many of her grandfather's lordly ways as well as a goodly share of his

high temper. The military title seemed to suit her better than her own name, for in her fearless baby fashion she won her way into the old man's heart, and he made a complete surrender.

Afterward when she and her mother and "Papa Jack" went to live with him at Locust, one of her favourite games was playing soldier. The old man never tired of watching her march through the wide halls with his spurs strapped to her tiny slipper heels, and her dark eyes flashing out fearlessly from under the little Napoleon cap she wore.

She was eleven when she gave her house party. One of the guests was Joyce Ware, whom some of you have met, perhaps, in "The Gate of the Giant Scissors," a bright thirteen-year-old girl from the West. Eugenia Forbes was another. She was a distant cousin of Lloyd's, who had no home-life like the other girls. Her winters were spent in a fashionable New York boarding-school, and her summers at the Waldorf-Astoria, except the few weeks when her busy father could find time to take her to some seaside resort.

The third guest, Elizabeth Lloyd Lewis, or Betty, as every one lovingly called her, was Mrs. Sherman's little god-daughter. She was an orphan, boarding on a backwoods farm on Green River. She had

never been on the cars until Lloyd's invitation found its way to the Cuckoo's Nest. Only these three came to stay in the house, but Malcolm and Keith MacIntyre (the two little Knights of Kentucky) were there nearly every day. So was Rob Moore, one of the Little Colonel's summer neighbours.

The four Bobs were four little fox terrier puppies named for Rob, who had given one to each of the girls. They were so much alike they could only be distinguished by the colour of the ribbons tied around their necks. Tarbaby was the Little Colonel's pony, and Lad the one that Betty rode during her visit.

After six weeks of picnics and parties, and all sorts of surprises and good times, the house party came to a close with a grand feast of lanterns. Joyce regretfully went home to the little brown house in Plainsville, Kansas, taking her Bob with her. Eugenia and her father went to New York, but not until they had promised to come back for Betty in the fall, and take her abroad with them. It was on account of something that had happened at the house party, but which is too long a tale to repeat here.

Betty stayed on at Locust until the end of the summer in the House Beautiful, as she called her godmother's home, and here on the long vine-covered

porch, with its stately white pillars, you shall see them first through the steam of the magic caldron.)

Listen! Now the kettle boils and the bells begin the story!

CHAPTER II.

THE END OF THE SUMMER.

"Oh, the sun shines bright on my old Kentucky home,
'Tis summer, the darkies are gay,
The corn-top's ripe and the meadows are in bloom,
And the birds make music all the day."

It was Malcolm who started the old tune, thrumming a soft accompaniment on his banjo, as he sat leaning against one of the great white pillars of the vine-covered porch. Then Betty, swinging in a hammock with a new *St. Nicholas* in her lap, began to hum with him. Rob Moore, sitting on the step below, took it up next, whistling it softly, but the Little Colonel and Keith went on talking.

It was a warm September afternoon, and all down the long avenue of giant locust-trees there was scarcely a leaf astir. Keith fanned himself with his hat as he talked.

"I wish schools had never been invented," he exclaimed, "or else there was a law that they couldn't begin until cold weather. It makes me wild

when I think of having to go back to Louisville to-morrow and begin lessons in that hot old town. Lloyd, I don't believe that you are half thankful enough for being able to live in the country all the year round."

"But it isn't half so nice out heah aftah you all leave," answered the Little Colonel. "You don't know how lonesome the Valley is with you all gone. I can't beah to pass Judge Moore's place for weeks aftah the house is closed for the season. It makes me feel as if somebody's dead when I see every window shut and all the blinds down. When Betty goes home next week I don't know how I shall stand it to be all by myself. This has been such a lovely summah."

"We've had some jolly good times, that's a fact," answered Keith with a sigh, to think that they were so nearly over. Then beating time with his foot to the music of Malcolm's banjo, he began to sing with the others:

"'Oh, weep no more, my lady, weep no more to-day.
We will sing one song for my old Kentucky home,
For my old Kentucky home far away.'"

Something in the mournful melody, coupled with the thought that this was the end of the summer,

and the last of such visits to beautiful old Locust for many a long day, touched each face with a little shade of sadness. For several minutes after the last note of the song died away no one spoke. The only sounds were the bird-calls, and the voices of the cook's grandchildren, who were playing on the other side of the house.

As in many old Southern mansions, the kitchen at Locust was a room some distance back from the house. In the path that led from one to the other, three little darkies were romping and tumbling over each other like three black kittens.

Fat old Aunt Cindy, waddling into the pantry to flour-bin or sugar-barrel, glanced at them occasionally through the open window to see that they were in no mischief, and then went calmly on with her baking. She knew that they were not like white children who need a nurse to watch every step. They had taken care of themselves and each other from the time that they had learned to crawl.

In Aunt Cindy's slow journeys around the kitchen, she stopped from time to time to open the oven door and peep in. Finally she flung it wide open, and, with a satisfied grunt, took out a big square pan. A warm delicious odour filled the kitchen, and floated out around the house to the group on the porch.

"I smell gingerbread!" exclaimed Rob, starting up and sniffing the air excitedly with his short freckled nose.

"Me too!" exclaimed Keith. "It's the best thing I ever smelled in my life. Doesn't it make you hungry?"

"Fairly starved!" answered Malcolm.

Lloyd tiptoed to the end of the porch and listened. "If Aunt Cindy's singin' one of her old camp-meetin' tunes then I'd know she was feelin' good, and I wouldn't mind tellin' her that we wanted the whole pan full. But if she happened to be in one of her black tempahs I wouldn't da'h ask for a crumb. She always grumbles if she has to cut a cake while it's hot. She says it spoils them. No, she isn't singin' a note."

"Somebody might slip it out while she isn't looking," suggested Rob. "I'd offer to try, but Aunt Cindy seems to have a grudge against me. She cracked me over the head one day with a gourd dipper, because I spilled molasses on the pantry floor. We wanted to make some candy, and Lloyd sent me in through the window to get it. I dropped the jug, and Aunt Cindy charged at me so furiously that I went out of that window a sight faster than I came in. Whew! I can feel that whack yet!" he added,

screwing up his face, and rubbing his head. "You'd better believe I've kept out of her reach ever since."

"I'll tell you what let's do," suggested Keith, growing hungrier every minute as he snuffed that tantalising fragrance. "Let's play that Aunt Cindy is an ogre, a dreadful old fat black ogre, and the gingerbread is some kind of a magic cake that will break the spell she has cast over us, if we can only manage to get it and eat some."

"Oh, yes," agreed Rob, eagerly. "Don't you remember the story that Joyce used to tell us about the Giant Scissors that could do anything they were bidden, if the command were only given in rhyme? Whoever rescues the cake will be the magic Scissors. We can draw lots to see who will be it. Make up a rhyme somebody."

> "Giant Scissahs, so bewitchin',
> Get the cake out of the kitchen!"

ventured the Little Colonel after a moment's thought.

> "Giant Scissors, for our sake
> Will you please to take the cake."

added Malcolm, while Betty followed with the suggestion:

> "Giant Scissors, rush ahead
> And bring us back the gingerbread."

"That's the best one," said Rob, "for that calls the article that we're starving for by name. Now we'll draw lots and see who has to play the part of the Scissors and storm old Gruffanuff's castle."

Carefully arranging five blades of grass between his thumbs, he passed around the circle, saying, "The one who draws the shortest piece has to be 'it.'" There was a shout from all the others and a groan from himself when he discovered that the shortest piece had been left between his own thumbs.

"I'll have to put on my thinking cap and plan some way to get it by strategy," he exclaimed, dropping down on the steps again to consider. "I wouldn't brave Aunt Cindy in single combat any more than I'd beard a lion in his den. Help me think of something, all of you."

Just then the three little pickaninnies, who had been playing in the path by the kitchen door, ran around the corner of the porch in hot pursuit of a grasshopper.

"Here, Pearline," called Rob, beckoning to the largest and blackest of them. The child stopped and came slowly toward him. Her head, with its tight little braids of wool sticking out in all directions like tails, was tipped shyly to one side. One

finger was in her mouth. With the other hand she was nervously plucking at the skirt of her red calico dress.

"What's your gran'mammy doing now?" inquired Rob.

"Beatin' aigs in de kitchen." Pearline was wriggling and screwing her little black toes around in the dust as she answered, almost overcome with embarrassment.

"Pearline," said Rob, lowering his voice impressively, "do you think that you could slip into the kitchen as e-easy as a creep-mouse and tiptoe into the pantry behind your gran'mammy's back and pass that pan of gingerbread out through the window to me while she isn't looking? I'll give you a nickel if you'll try."

Pearline gave a swift inquiring look toward the Little Colonel, and seeing her nod consent, she turned to Rob with a delighted flash of white teeth and eye-balls.

"Yessa, Mist Rob. I kin do it if you'll come whilst she's makin' a racket beatin' aigs. But she'll bus' my haid open suah, if she cotch me."

"Mothah doesn't care if we have the gingahbread," said the Little Colonel, and Rob added, reassuringly, "We won't let her touch you. Now I'm going all

the way around by the spring-house, so she can't see me, for I'm her sworn enemy. When I get under the pantry window I'll call like some bird — say a pewee. When you hear that, Pearline, you just come a-jumping. She always sets the things out on that shelf under the pantry window to cool, and you slip in and pass that gingerbread out to me before she has time to guess what's happened."

Rob started off, and a moment later the clear call of "pewee" floated up from under the pantry window, to the waiting group on the porch. "Come on, let's see the ogre get him," called Keith. Just as they rushed around the corner of the house they heard a scream, and then a mighty clatter of falling tinware in the kitchen made them pause.

There was a scurry of flying feet through the orchard, and a snapping of dry twigs. Rob had made his escape with the gingerbread, but hapless Pearline had fallen into the clutches of the ogre. Only for a moment, however. Through the window came a flash of red calico, and up the path two bare black legs went flying like run-away windmills. The broad slap-slap of Aunt Cindy's pursuing slipper soles followed, but it was an uneven race. Pearline, wasting not a single breath in outcry, fled around the house and down the avenue like a swift black

shadow, and her panting pursuer was left to hold her fat sides in helpless wrath.

"Just you wait till I get my hands on you, chile," she called with an angry toss of her white-turbaned head. "I'll make you sma't! I'll learn you to come carryin' off white folkses vittles an' scarin' me out of my seven senses!"

"No, Aunt Cindy, you sha'n't touch her! You mustn't do a thing to Pearline," called the Little Colonel, meeting her squarely in the path and stamping her foot. "It's all ou' fault, because we sent her, and it was Rob who carried off the gingahbread. There he comes now."

Aunt Cindy darted an angry look at her sworn enemy, as he came up with hands and mouth both full. Then facing the children, with her hands on her hips, she launched into such a scolding as only an old black mammy, who has faithfully served three generations of a family, is permitted to give.

"For mercy sakes, Aunt Cindy, what are you making such a fuss for?" exclaimed Keith. "It's all your own fault. You know as well as we do that nobody in the Valley can make cake as good as yours. You oughtn't to have tempted us with such delicious gingerbread. It's the best I ever tasted." Here he stuffed his mouth full again, with an ecstatic

"*Yum*, but that's good," and passed the plate back to Betty.

There was no resisting the flattery of Keith's expression as he swallowed the stolen sweets. A grim smile twitched Aunt Cindy's black face, but to hide the fact that her vanity had been touched by the chorus of unstinted praise which followed Keith's compliments, she began flapping her face with her gingham apron.

"Oh, you go 'long!" she exclaimed, in a gruff voice. But knowing Aunt Cindy, they knew that they had appeased her, and even Pearline need no longer fear her wrath, although she grumbled loudly all the way back to her savoury kitchen.

They carried the plate around to the porch, followed by the three Bobs in their big bows of yellow, pink, and green, who tumbled around their feet, begging for crumbs until the last one was eaten, and then curled up in the hammock beside Betty.

"I wonder what we'll be doing ten years from now," said Malcolm, as he picked up his banjo again and began striking soft chords. He was looking dreamily down the long locust avenue where the afternoon shadows were lengthening across the lawn.

"I'll be through college by that time, and Rob

and Keith will be starting back for their junior year. You girls will be out in society probably, and old Aunt Cindy will surely be dead and gone. I wonder if we'll ever sit here together again and talk about old times and laugh over this afternoon — the way Pearline flew through that window. Wasn't it funny?"

"I am more interested in what I may be doing ten weeks from now," said Betty. "I haven't an idea whether I'll be in London or Paris or the Black Forest. I don't know where Cousin Carl expects to take us first. But I'd rather not know. The whole trip is sure to be full of delightful surprises as a fruit-cake is of goodies. I'd rather happen on them as they come, than crumble it up to find what there'll be ten bites ahead."

"Well, I know what I'll be doing," said the Little Colonel, decidedly. "School begins then, and it will be the same old things ovah and ovah again. Music lessons, practice an' school; school an' practice an' music lessons. Oh, I know what is ahead of me. All plain cake without a single plum in it."

"Don't be so sure of that, little daughter," said a pleasant voice in the doorway, and looking up, they saw Mrs. Sherman standing there with an open letter in her hand. "We can never be sure of our

to-morrows, or even our to-days, and here is a surprise for you to begin with, Lloyd."

Malcolm sprang up to bring her a chair, and Lloyd tumbled the Bobs out of the hammock that she might take their place beside Betty, while she listened to the reading of the letter.

"It is from Mrs. Appleton — from your Cousin Hetty," began Mrs. Sherman, turning to Betty. "I wrote her that you wanted to go back to the farm a little while before starting abroad with Eugenia and her father, and this is her answer. She has invited Lloyd and me to go with you for a short visit."

"Oh, godmother! And you'll go?" cried Betty, nearly spilling Lloyd out of the hammock as she sprang up in joyful surprise. "You don't know how I've dreaded leaving you and dear old Locust. It will not be half so hard if you can go with me, and I want you both to see Davy and all the places I've talked about so often."

"But how can I miss school, mothah?" cried the Little Colonel. "I'll fall behind in all my classes."

"Not so far but that you can make it up afterward by a little extra study. Besides, you will be going to school every day that you are away. I don't mean the kind you are thinking of," she hastened to say,

seeing the look of wonder in Lloyd's eyes. "But every day will be a school day and you'll learn more of some things than all your books can teach you. There are all sorts of lessons waiting for you in the Cuckoo's Nest."

Lloyd and Betty gave each other a delighted hug while Rob remarked, mournfully, "I wish my father and mother wanted me to have some school days that are all holidays. Think, of it, boys, not a line of Latin."

The five o'clock train came rumbling down the track with a shrill warning whistle, as it passed the entrance gate at Locust.

"It is time to go, Keith," exclaimed Malcolm. "You know we promised grandmother and Aunt Allison to be back at half-past five. We must say good-bye now, for ten whole months."

"It will be longer than that for me," said Betty, wistfully, as the boys came up to shake hands. "There is no telling what will happen with the ocean between us. But no matter where I go, I'll never forget how lovely you have all been to me this summer, and I'll always think of this as the dearest spot on earth, — my old Kentucky home."

They watched the three boys go strolling off down the avenue, shoulder to shoulder, feeling that all the

good times were disappearing with them. Then they fell to talking of the Cuckoo's Nest, and making plans for their visit. But what happened there must wait to be told at the second bubbling of the caldron and another ringing of the bells.

CHAPTER III.

BACK TO THE CUCKOO'S NEST.

It was very early on a bright September morning that Mrs. Sherman, Betty, and Lloyd took the train for the Cuckoo's Nest; but there was such a long time to wait at the little way station where they changed cars, that it was nearly sundown when they came to the end of their journey.

Mr. Appleton was waiting for them with the big farm wagon, into which he lifted Betty's Bob, whining in his hamper, Mrs. Sherman's trunk, and then Betty's shabby little leather one that had gone away half empty. It was coming back now, nearly bursting with all that her godmother had packed into it with the magic necklace, "for love's sweet sake."

"Shall we have to wait long for the carriage?" asked Lloyd, shading her eyes with her hand to look down the dusty road. "There is nothing in sight now."

Mr. Appleton gave a hearty laugh as he pointed with his whip to the wagon. "That's the kind of a

carriage folks ride in out here," he said. "I reckon you never rode in one before. Well, it will be a new experience for you, for it jolts considerable. I couldn't put in more than one spring seat on account of the trunks, but there's room enough for you and your ma beside me, and I brought along a little stool for Betty to sit on."

Lloyd's face flushed at her mistake, and she was very quiet as they drove along. The wagon did "jolt considerable," as Mr. Appleton said, and she wondered if she should find everything as queer during her visit as this ride from the railroad station to the house. The spring seat was so high that her feet dangled helplessly. She could not touch the floor of the wagon bed even with her toes. Every time they went down a hill she had to clutch her mother's arm to keep from pitching forward on top of Betty, seated on the low stool at her feet.

Betty was quiet, too, thinking how much had happened in the three months since she had passed along that road. She had gone away in a sunbonnet, with an old-fashioned brown wicker basket on her arm, and a feeling in her frightened little heart that the world was a great jungle, full of all sorts of unknown terrors. She was coming back now, in a hat as stylish as Lloyd's own, with a handsome little

travelling satchel in her hands, and a heartful of beautiful memories; for she had met nothing but kindness, so far as she had travelled in the world's wide jungle.

"There's the schoolhouse," she cried, presently, with a thrill of pleasure as they passed the deserted playground, overgrown with weeds. It was still vacation time in this country district. "There's our playhouse under the thorn-tree," she added, half rising from the stool to point it out to Lloyd. "And that bare spot by the well-shed is where we play vineyard and prisoner's base. We always have so much fun at recess."

The Little Colonel looked where Betty pointed, but the weather-beaten schoolhouse, the weeds, and the trampled spot of ground did not suggest any good times to her. It seemed the lonesomest, dreariest place she had ever seen, and she turned away with a slight shrug of the shoulders. Not so slight, however, but Betty saw it. Then, suddenly she began to look at everything through the Little Colonel's eyes. Somehow everything began to appear ragged and gone-to-seed and little and countrified and common. So she did not exclaim again when they passed any of the other old landmarks that had grown dear to her from long acquaintance.

There was the half-way tree, and the bridge where they always stopped to lean over the railing and make rings in the water below, by dropping pebbles into the clear pools. And there was the flat rock where they could nearly always find a four-leaf clover, and, farther along, the stile where a pet toad lived. She and Davy always pretended that the toad was a toll-gate keeper who would not let them climb the stile unless they paid him with flies.

All these places were dear to Betty, and she had intended to point them out to Lloyd as they went along; but after that shrug, she felt that they would have no interest for any one but herself. So she sat quietly on the little stool, wishing that Lloyd could enjoy the ride home as much as she was doing.

"Oh, how lonesome looking!" exclaimed Lloyd, as they turned the last corner and came to the graveyard, with its gleaming tombstones. Betty only smiled in reply. They were like old friends to her, but of course Lloyd could not understand that. She had never strolled among them with Davy on summer afternoons, or parted the tangled grass and myrtle vines to read the names and verses on the mossy marbles, or smelled the pinks and lilies growing over the neglected mounds.

The wild rose was gone, that had hung over the

old gray picket-fence to wave good-bye to Betty the morning she went away, but the same bush held out a long straggling branch that almost touched her face as they drove past, and the sunset glow shone pink across it. Beside it was the headstone with the marble hand for ever pointing to the place in the marble book where were deeply carven the letters of the text, "*Be ye also ready.*" With that familiar greeting Betty felt that at last she had really reached home, and indeed that she had scarcely been away. For everything was just as she had left it, from the spicy smell of the cedar boughs, to the soft cooing of a dove in a distant woodland. Cow-bells jingled in the lane, and the country quiet and contentment seemed to fill the meadows, as the sunset glow filled all the evening sky.

"There's Davy," said Mr. Appleton, as a chubby, barefoot boy came racing down the lane to open the gate for them, and then hang on the back of the wagon as it rattled along to the house.

"He has been talking about you all week, Betty. He couldn't eat any dinner to-day, he was so excited about your coming."

Betty smiled back at the beaming little face, as shining as yellow soap and perfect happiness could make it, and her conscience smote her that she had

not missed him more, and written to him oftener while she was away from him. But however great his loneliness might have been, it was all forgotten at the sight of her, and his delight was unbounded when the hamper was unstrapped and Bob came tumbling out to frisk over his bare toes.

"Now Betty will have two shadows," laughed Mr. Appleton. "That boy follows her everywhere."

Betty led the way into the house. On the porch steps Lloyd stopped her to whisper: "Mercy, Betty! How many children are there?" Several tow heads like Davy's were peering around the corner of the house, and a two-year-old baby toddled across the porch, squeezing a kitten in his arms.

"There are six, altogether," answered Betty. "Scott is just Rob Moore's age, but he is so bashful that you'll not see much of him. Then there's Bradley. He is such a tease that we keep out of his way as much as possible. Davy comes next. He's the nicest in the bunch. Then Morgan is six, and Lee is four, and that's the baby over there. They haven't named him yet, so the boys just call him Pudding."

"And is that your cousin Hetty?" whispered Lloyd, as a tall, thin woman came out on the porch to greet her guests. In that greeting Betty forgot

that Mrs. Appleton was only a fourth cousin, her welcome was so warm; she thought only how nice it was to have a family to come back to. Looking into the woman's tired face with eyes that had grown wiser in the summer's absence, the child saw that it was hard work and care that had made it grow old before its time, and realised that the tenderness she had longed for had been withheld only because her cousin Hetty had been too overworked to take time to show it.

"Maybe she might have been as bright and sweet as godmother, if she hadn't had to work so hard," thought Betty. "Still I can't imagine godmother saying snappy cross things, no matter how tired she might get."

"Supper's most ready," said Mrs. Appleton, ushering them into the house. "I reckon you'll want to tidy up a bit after that long ride on the dusty cars. Well, Molly didn't forget to fill the water-pitcher, after all, though she usually forgets everything, unless I'm at her heels every blessed minute to remind her."

"Molly!" repeated Betty, in surprise. "Who is she?"

"Oh, I forgot you didn't know. She is an orphan I took from the asylum soon after you left. It's

been such a hard summer that I had to have somebody to help, so Mr. Appleton went to St. Joseph's orphan asylum and picked me out this girl. She's fourteen, and big for her age, but as wild as a Comanche Indian. So I can't say she's been as much help as I'd hoped for. But she's good to the baby, and she can wash dishes. They taught her that at the asylum. I tell you I've missed *you*, Betty. I didn't realise how many steps you saved me until you were gone. Now, if you'll excuse me, Mrs. Sherman, I'll go and see about supper. You'll find your room just as you left it, Betty."

As the door closed behind her and Betty, the Little Colonel turned to her mother with a puzzled face. "Did you evah see anything so queah in all yo' life?" she asked. "A bed in the pahlah! What if somebody should come to call aftah I've gone to sleep. Oh, I think this place is awful! I don't see how people can be happy, living in such an odd way."

"That is your first holiday lesson," said Mrs. Sherman, beginning to unpack her travelling bag. "You'll have to learn that our way of living is not the only way, and that people can be just as good and useful and happy in one place as another. Some people are so narrow-minded that they never learn that. They are like car-wheels that can move only

when they have a certain kind of track to run on. You can be that kind of a person, or you can be like a bicycle, able to run on any road, from the narrowest path to the broadest avenue. I've found that people who can fit themselves to any road they may happen to be on are the happiest, and they are the easiest to live with. That is one of the greatest accomplishments any one can have, Lloyd. I'd rather have my little daughter able to adapt herself gracefully to all circumstances, than to sing or paint or model or embroider.

"You are going to find things very different here from what you have been accustomed to at home, but it wouldn't be polite or kind to appear to notice any difference. For instance, some of the best people I ever knew think it is silly to serve dinner in courses, as we do. They like to see everything on the table at once, — soup, salad, meats, and desserts."

"I hate everything all higgledy-piggledy!" muttered the Little Colonel, with her face in a towel. "I'll try not to show it, mothah, but I'm afraid I can't help it sometimes."

Meanwhile, Betty, with Davy tagging after her, and Bob frisking on ahead, had started up the steps to her own little room in the west gable. As she turned on the landing, the door at the foot of the

stairs moved slightly, and she caught the gleam of a pair of sharp gray eyes peering at her through the crack.

"It's Molly!" whispered Davy, catching Betty's skirts, and scrambling after her as fast as his short fat legs would allow.

"Say, Betty, did you know that she's a *witch?* She says that she can go through keyholes, and that on dark nights she sails away over the chimney on a broomstick with a black cat on her shoulder. Even Scott and Bradley are afraid of her. They dasn't do anything she tells them not to."

"Sh!" whispered Betty, warningly, with a backward glance over her shoulder. The girl behind the door had stepped out on the landing for a better view, but she darted back to her hiding-place as Betty turned, and their eyes met.

"She looks like a gypsy," thought Betty, noticing her straight black hair hanging around her eyes. "And she seems ready to dodge at a word."

"She tells us ghost stories every night after supper," exclaimed Davy. They had reached the gable room, and, while Betty hung up her hat and unlocked her trunk, he curled himself up comfortably on the foot of her bed. "She can make you shiver no matter how hot a night it is."

Betty scarcely noticed what the boy was saying. At any other time she would have been surprised at his talking so much. Just now she was looking around her with a feeling of strangeness. Everything seemed so much smaller than when she had left the place. Her room had not seemed bare and cheerless before she went away, because she had seen no better. But now, remembering the pretty room that had been hers in the House Beautiful, the tears came into her eyes. For a moment the contrast made her homesick. Instead of the crystal candlesticks, here was a battered tin one. Here were no filmy curtains at the windows, no white fur rugs on a dark polished floor. Only a breadth of faded rag carpet, spread down on bare unpainted boards. Here was no white toilet-table with furnishings of gold and ivory; no polished mirror in which she could see herself from head to foot. She looked mournfully into the tiny looking-glass that was so small that she could see only one-half of her face at a time. Then from force of habit she stood on tiptoe to see the other half. The mouth was not smiling as it used to in the old days.

She was recalled from her homesick reverie by Davy's voice again.

"Molly didn't want you and that other girl to

come here," he confided. "She said you'd be snobs; that all rich people were. Bradley asked Molly what a snob was, and said if it was anything bad that she shouldn't call you that, 'cause you wasn't one, and always tied his fingers up when he cut hisself, and helped him with his mul'plication tables and everything. And Molly said she'd call you what she pleased, and treat you just as mean as you deserved, and if we dared say a word she'd shut the first one that tried it up in the smoke-house in the dark; then she'd say *abra-ca-dab-ra* over us."

Davy's voice sank to a frightened whisper as he rolled the dread word over his tongue in unconscious imitation of Molly. He was quivering with excitement, and his cheeks were unusually red. He had talked more in the few minutes than he often did in days.

"Why, Davy, what's the matter?" cried Betty. "What do you mean by abracadabra?"

"Hush! Don't say it so loud," he begged earnestly. "It's Molly's hoodoo word. Bradley says she can conjure you with it, same as coloured folks when they put a rabbit's foot on you. I had to tell, 'cause I'm afraid Molly's going to do something mean to you."

"Does your mother know that she tells you those

silly things?" demanded Betty, turning on him quickly. But Davy had lost his tongue, now that his confession was made, and only shook his head in reply.

"Then don't listen to her any more, Davy boy," she said, taking him by the ears and kissing him playfully, first on one dimpled cheek and then on the other. "Poor Molly doesn't know any better, and she must have lived with dreadful people before she went to the orphan asylum. You stay with Lloyd and me, after this, and don't have anything more to do with her when she tells you such stories."

"That's just what she said you'd do," said Davy, finding his voice again. "She said that you and that other girl would be stuck up and wouldn't play with her, or let us either, and that she'd always be left out of everything. But she'd get even with you for coming in with your high and mighty airs and fine clothes to turn us against her."

"That's the silliest thing I ever heard," answered Betty, indignantly. Then a puzzled look crept into her brown eyes, as she stood pouring out the water to wash her face. "I'll ask godmother about it," she said to herself. "She'll tell us how we ought to treat her."

But there was no opportunity that evening. Molly sat down to the supper-table with them, much to the surprise of the Little Colonel, unused to the primitive customs of farm life, where no social difference is made between those who are served and those who do the serving. Remembering her mother's little sermon, she did not show her surprise by the smallest change of expression.

After supper Betty offered to help with the dishes as usual, but her cousin Hetty sent her away, saying it would not do to soil her pretty travelling dress; that she was company now, and to run away and entertain Lloyd. So Betty, with a sigh of relief, went back to the porch, where Mr. Appleton, with Pudding in his lap, was talking with Mrs. Sherman.

Betty hated dish-washing, and after her long holiday at the house party it seemed doubly hard to go back to such unpleasant duties. She did not see the swift jealous look that followed her from Molly's keen eyes, or the sullen pout that settled on the older girl's lips, as, left to herself, she rattled the cups and plates recklessly, in her envious mood.

Out on the porch Betty sank into a comfortable rocking-chair, and sat looking up at the stars. "Isn't it sweet and still out here, godmother?" she asked, after awhile. "I love to hear that owl hooting away

off in the woods, and listen to the pine-trees whispering that way, and the frogs croaking down in the meadow pond."

"Oh, I don't," cried the Little Colonel, with something like a sob in her voice, as she nestled her head closer against her mother's shoulder. "It makes me feel as lonesome as when Mom Beck sings 'Fa'well, my dyin' friends.' I think they're the most doleful sounds I evah heard."

Presently, when Mr. Appleton went in to carry the sleepy baby to bed, the Little Colonel put her arms around her mother's neck, whispering, "Oh, mothah, I wish we were back at Locust. I'm so homesick and disappointed in the place. Can't we go home in the mawnin'?"

"I think my little girl is so tired and sleepy that she doesn't know what she wants," whispered Mrs. Sherman, in reply. "Come, let me take you to bed. You'll think differently in the morning. Do you remember the old song?

"'Colours seen by candle-light
Never look the same by day.'"

CHAPTER IV.

"TO BARLEY-BRIGHT."

THE next few days went by happily for the Little Colonel, for Betty took her to all her favourite haunts, and kept her entertained from morning till night. Once they stayed all day in the woods below the barn, building a playhouse at the base of a great oak-tree, with carpets of moss, and cups and saucers made of acorns.

Scott and Bradley joined them, and for once played peaceably, building a furnace in the ravine with some flat stones and an old piece of stove pipe. There they cooked their dinner. Davy was sent to raid the garden and spring-house, and even Lee and Morgan were allowed a place at the feast, when one came in with a hatful of guinea eggs that he had found in the orchard, and the other loaned his new red wheelbarrow, to add to the housekeeping outfit.

"Isn't this fun!" exclaimed the Little Colonel, as she watched Betty, who stood over the furnace

with a very red face, scrambling the eggs in an old pie-pan. "I bid to be the cook next time we play out here, and I'm going to make a furnace like this when I go back to Locust."

High above them, up the hill, on the back porch of the farmhouse, Molly stood ironing sheets and towels. Whenever she glanced down into the shady hollow, she could see Lloyd's pink dress fluttering along the ravine, or Betty's white sunbonnet bobbing up from behind the rocks. The laughing voices and the shouts of the boys came tantalisingly to her ears, and the old sullen pout settled on her face as she listened.

"It isn't fair that I should have to work all day long while they are off having a good time," she muttered, slapping an iron angrily down on the stove. "I s'pose they think that because I'm so big I oughtn't to care about playing; but I couldn't help growing so fast. If I *am* nearly as big as Mrs. Appleton, that doesn't keep me from feeling like a little girl inside. I'm only a year older than Scott. I *hate* them! I wish that little Sherman girl would fall into a brier patch and scratch her face, and that a hornet would sting Betty Lewis smack in the mouth!"

By and by a tear sizzled down on the hot iron in her

hand. "It isn't fair!" she sobbed again, "for them to have everything and me nothing, not even to know where my poor little sister is. Maybe somebody's beating her this very minute, or she is shut up in a dark closet crying for me." With that thought, all the distressing scenes that had made her past life miserable began to crowd into her mind, and the tears sizzled faster and faster on the hot iron, as she jerked it back and forth over a long towel.

There had been beatings and dark closets for Molly many a time before she was rescued by the orphan asylum, and the great fear of her life was that there was still the same cruel treatment for the little sister who had not been rescued, but who had been hidden away by their drunken father when the Humane Society made its search for her.

Three years had passed since they were lost from each other. Molly was only eleven then, and Dot, although nearly seven, was such a tiny, half-starved little thing that she seemed only a baby in her sister's eyes. Many a night, when the wind moaned in the chimney, or the rats scampered in the walls, Molly had started up out of a sound sleep, staring fearfully into the darkness, thinking that she had heard Dot calling to her. Then suddenly remember-

ing that Dot was too far away to make her hear, no matter how wildly she might call, she had buried her face in her pillow, and sobbed and sobbed until she fell asleep.

The matron of the asylum knew why she often came down in the morning with red eyes and swollen face, and the knowledge made her more patient with the wayward girl. Nobody taxed her patience more than Molly, with her unhappy moods, her outbursts of temper, and her suspicious, jealous disposition. She loved to play, and yelled and ran like some wild creature, whenever she had a chance, climbing the highest trees, making daring leaps from forbidden heights, and tearing her clothes into ribbons. But she rebelled at having to work, and in all the time she was at the asylum the matron had found only one lovable trait in her. It was her affection for the little lost sister that made her gentle to the smaller children on the place and kind to the animals.

She had been happier since coming to the Appleton farm, where there were no rules, and the boys accepted her leadership admiringly. She found great pleasure in inventing wild tales for their entertainment, in frightening them with stories of ghosts and hobgoblins, and in teaching them new

games which she had played in alleys with boot-blacks and street gamins.

All that had stopped with the arrival of the visitors. Their coming brought her more work, and left her less time to play. The sight of Lloyd and Betty in their dainty dresses aroused her worst jealousy, and awoke the old bitterness that had grown up in her slum life, and that always raged within her whenever she saw people with whom fortune had dealt more kindly than with herself. All that day, while the seven happy children played and sang in the shady woodland, she went around at her work with a rebellious feeling against her lot. Everything she did was to the tune of a bitter refrain that kept echoing through her sore heart: "It isn't fair! It isn't fair!"

Late in the afternoon a boy came riding up from the railroad station with a telegram for Mrs. Sherman. It was the first one that had ever been sent to the farm, and Bradley, who had gone up to the house for a hatchet, waited to watch Mrs. Sherman tear open the yellow envelope.

"Take it to Lloyd, please," she said, after a hurried reading. "Tell her to hurry up to the house." Thrusting the message into his hand, she hurried out of the room, to find Mrs. Appleton. Bradley felt

very important at being the bearer of a telegram, and ran down the hill as fast as his bare feet could carry him over the briers and dry stubble. He would have teased Lloyd awhile by making her guess what he had, before giving it to her, if it had not been for Mrs. Sherman's request to hurry.

Lloyd read the message aloud. "*Aunt Jane alarmingly ill; wants to see you. Come immediately.*" "Oh, how provoking!" she exclaimed. "I s'pose we'll have to start right off. We always do. We nevah plan to go anywhere or do anything without Aunt Jane gets sick and thinks she's goin' to die. She's an old, old lady," she hastened to explain, seeing Betty's shocked face. "She's my great-aunt, you know, 'cause she's my grandmothah's sistah. I wouldn't have minded it so much when we first came," she confessed, "but I don't want to leave now, one bit. We've had a lovely time to-day, and I hate to go away befo' I've seen the cave you promised to take me to and the Glenrock watahfall, and all those places."

It never occurred to the Little Colonel that she might be left behind, until she reached the house and found her mother with her hat on, packing her satchel.

"I've barely time to catch the next train," she

said, as Lloyd came running into the room. "It is a two-mile drive to the station, you know, and there's not time to get you and all your things ready to take with me. It wouldn't be wise, anyhow, for everything is always in confusion at Aunt Jane's when she is ill. Mrs. Appleton will take good care of you, and you can follow me next week if Aunt Jane is better. Betty will come with you, and we'll have a nice little visit in the city while she does her shopping and gets ready for her journey. I'll write to you as soon as I can decide when it will be best for you to come. Aunt Jane's illness is probably half scare, like all her others, but still I feel that I must never lose a moment when she sends for me, as she might be worse than we think."

Mrs. Sherman packed rapidly while she talked, and almost before Lloyd realised that she was really to be left behind, a light buckboard was at the door, and Mr. Appleton was standing beside the horse's head waiting. There was not even time for Lloyd to cling around her mother's neck and be petted and comforted for the sudden separation. There was a hasty hug, a loving kiss, and a whispered "Good-bye, little daughter. Mother's sorry to go without her little girl, but it can't be helped. The time will soon pass — only a week, and remem-

ber this is one of your school days, and the lesson set for you to learn is *Patience*."

Lloyd smiled bravely while she promised to be good and not give Mrs. Appleton any trouble. Her mother, looking back as they drove away, saw the two little girls standing with their arms around each other, waving their handkerchiefs, and thought thankfully, "I am glad that Lloyd is here with Betty instead of at Locust. She'll not have time to be lonesome with so many playmates."

It was hard for Lloyd to keep back the tears as the carriage passed out of sight around the corner of the graveyard. But Bradley challenged her to a race down-hill, and with a loud whoop they all started helter-skelter back to the ravine to play. She had been busy making some pine-cone chairs for the little parlour at the roots of the oak-tree, when the telegram called her away, and now she went back to that delightful occupation, working busily until the supper-horn blew to call the men from the field. It was always a pleasure to Lloyd to hear that horn, and several times she had puffed at it until she was red in the face, in her vain attempts to blow it herself. All the sound she could awaken was a short dismal toot. It was a cow's horn, carved and polished, that had been used for nearly forty years to call the men

from the field. When Mrs. Appleton puckered her lips to blow it, her thin cheeks puffed out until they were as round and pink as the baby's, and the long mellow note went floating across the fields, clear and sweet, till the men at work in the farthest field heard it and answered with a far-away cheer.

"Let's get Molly to play Barley-bright with us to-night," said Bradley, as they trudged up the hill. "It is a fine game, and if we help her with the dishes, she'll get done in just a few minutes, and we'll have nearly an hour to play before it gets dark."

The same thought was in Molly's mind, for after supper she called the boys aside and whispered to them. She wanted to slip away from the girls and not allow them to join in the game; but Bradley would not listen to such an arrangement. He insisted that the game would not be any fun without them.

Then Molly, growing jealous, turned away with a pout, saying that she might have known it would be that way. They had had plenty of fun before the girls came, but to go ahead and do as they pleased. It didn't make any difference to *her*. *She* could get on very well by herself.

Lloyd had gone down to the spring-house with Mrs. Appleton, but Betty heard the dispute and put an end to it at once. "Here!" she cried, catching

up a towel. "Everybody come and help, and we'll be through before you can say Jack Robinson. Pour out the hot water, Molly. Get another towel, Bradley. We'll wipe, and Davy can carry the dishes to the pantry. We'll be through before Scott has half filled the wood-box."

Molly could not keep her jealous mood and sulky frowns very long in the midst of the laughing chatter that followed, and in a very few minutes Betty had talked her into good humour with herself and all the world. Such light work did the many hands make of the dish-washing, that the sky was still pink with the sunset glow when they were ready to begin the game.

"We always go down to the hay-barn to play Barley-bright," said Bradley. "I never cared for it when we played it at school in the day-time, but when we play it Molly's way it is the most exciting game I know. We usually wait till it begins to get dark and the lightning-bugs are flying about.

"Molly and I will stand the crowd, this time. Our base will be here at the persimmon-tree in front of the barn, and yours will be the pasture bars down yonder. The barn will be Barley-bright, and after we call out the questions and answers, you're to try to run around our base to the barn, and back again to

yours, without being caught by a witch. There are six of you, so you can have six runs to Barley-bright and back, and if by that time we have caught half of you the game is ours. The witch has the right to hide and jump out at you from any place she chooses, but I can't touch you except when you pass my base. Now shut your eyes till I count one hundred, while the witch hides."

Six pairs of hands were clasped over six pairs of eyes, while Bradley slowly counted, and Molly, darting away from his side, hid behind the straw-stack.

"One — hun-dred — all eyes open!" he shouted. They looked around. The fireflies were flashing across the pasture and the dusk was beginning to deepen. Then six voices rang out in chorus, Bradley's shrill pipe answering them.

"How many miles to Barley-bright?"
"Three score and ten!"
"Can I get there by candle-light?"
"Yes, if your legs are long and light —
There and back again!
Look out! The witches will catch you!"

Molly was nowhere in sight, so with a delicious thrill of excitement, not knowing from what ambush they would be pounced upon, the six pilgrims to Barley-bright started off at the top of their speed.

"TO THEIR EXCITED FANCY SHE SEEMED A REAL WITCH."

Across the pasture they rushed, around Bradley's base at the persimmon-tree, and up to the big barn door, which they were obliged to touch before they could turn and make a wild dash back to the pasture bars.

Just as they reached the barn door, Molly sprang out from behind the straw-stack; but they could not believe it was Molly, she was so changed. To their excited fancy she seemed a real witch. Her black hair was unbraided, and streamed out in elfish wisps from under a tall pointed black hat. A hideous mask covered her face, and she brandished the stump of an old broom with such effect that they ran from her, shrieking wildly.

Some heavy wrapping paper, a strip of white cotton cloth, and coal-soot from the bottom of a stove lid had changed an ordinary girl of fourteen into a nameless terror, from which they fled, shrieking at the top of their voices. The boys had been through the performance many times, but they enjoyed the cold thrill it gave them as much as Betty and Lloyd, who were feeling it for the first time.

Lee was caught in that first mad race, and Morgan in the second, and they had to go over to the enemy's base, where Bradley stood guard under the persimmon-tree. As they came in from the third

run, Lloyd leaned against the pasture bars, out of breath.

"Oh, I believe I should drop dead," she panted, "if that awful thing should get me. I can't believe that it is only Molly. She seems like a real suah 'nuff witch." She glanced over her shoulder again with a little nervous shudder as the others began calling again:

"*How many miles to Barley-bright?*"

Betty was caught this time, and Lloyd, to whom the game was becoming a terrible reality, stood with her heart beating like a trip-hammer and her eyes peering in a startled way through the dusk. This time the witch popped up from behind the pasture bars, and Lloyd, giving a startled look over her shoulder as she flew, saw that the broomstick was flourished in her direction, and the hideous black and white mask was almost upon her. With an ear-splitting scream she redoubled her speed, racing around and around the barn, instead of touching the door and turning back, when she saw that she was followed.

Finally, with one sharp scream of terror after another, she darted into the great dark barn, in a blind frenzy to escape. She heard the voices of the

children outside, the bang of the broomstick against the door, and then plunging forward, felt herself falling — falling!

There was just an instant in which she seemed to see the faces of her mother and Papa Jack. Then she remembered nothing more, for her head struck something hard, and she lay in a little heap on the floor below. She had fallen through a trap-door into an empty manger.

CHAPTER V.

A TIME FOR PATIENCE.

They thought at first that she was hiding in the barn, afraid to come out, lest Molly might be lying in wait to grab her. So they began calling: "Come on, Lloyd! King's X! King's excuse! Home free! You may come home free!" But there was no answer, and Betty, suddenly remembering the trap-door, grew white with fear.

The children played in the barn so much that Mr. Appleton's first order, when he hired a new man, was that the trap-door must always be closed and fastened the moment he finished pitching the hay down to the manger below. The children themselves had been cautioned time and again to keep away from it, but Lloyd, never having played in the barn before, was not aware of its existence.

"Lloyd, Lloyd!" called Betty, hurrying into the twilight of the big barn. There was no answer, and peering anxiously ahead, Betty saw that the trap-door was open, and on the floor below was

the gleam of the Little Colonel's light pink dress, shining white through the dusk.

Betty's startled cry brought the other children, who clattered down the barn stairs after her, into the straw-covered circle where the young calves were kept. They met Mr. Appleton, coming in from the corn-crib with a basket on his shoulder, and all began to talk at once. The words "Lloyd" and "trap-door" were all he could distinguish in the jumble of excited exclamations, but they told the whole story.

Hastily dropping his basket, he strode across to the manger that Betty pointed out, with a look of grave concern on his face. They all crowded breathlessly around him as he bent over the quiet little figure, lifting it gently in his arms. It was a solemn-faced little company that followed him up the hill with his unconscious burden. A cold fear seized Betty as she walked along, glancing at the Little Colonel's closed eyes, and the tiny stream of blood trickling across the still white face.

"Oh, if godmother were only here!" she groaned.

"There's no telling how badly Lloyd is hurt. Maybe she'll be a cripple for life. Oh, I wish I'd never heard of such a game as Barley-bright."

If the accident had happened at Locust, a doctor

would have been summoned to the spot, as fast as telephones and swift horses could bring him, and the whole household would have held its breath in anxiety. But very little fuss was made over accidents at the Cuckoo's Nest. It was a weekly occurrence for some of the children to be brought in limp and bleeding from various falls. Bradley had once sprained his neck turning somersaults down the hay-mow, so that he had not been able to look over his shoulder for two weeks. Scott had been picked up senseless twice, once from falling out of the top of a walnut-tree, and the other time because a high ladder broke under him. Every one of the boys but Pudding had at some time or another left a trail of blood behind him from barn to house as he went weeping homeward with some part of his body to be bandaged. So Lloyd's fall did not cause the commotion it might have done in a less adventurous family.

"Oh, she's coming around all right," said Mr. Appleton, cheerfully, as her head stirred a little on his shoulder, and she half opened her eyes.

"Here you are," he added a moment later, laying her on the bed in the parlour. "Scott, run call your mother. Bring a light, Molly. We'll soon see what is the matter."

There were no bones broken, and in a little while Lloyd sat up, white and dizzy. Then she walked across the room, and looked at herself in the little mirror hanging over a shelf, on which stood a bouquet of stiff wax flowers. It was hung so high and tilted forward so much, and the wax flowers were in the way, so that she could not get a very satisfactory view of her wounds, but she saw enough to make her feel like an old soldier home from the wars, with the marks of many battles upon her.

A bandage wet with arnica was tied around her head, over a large knot that was rapidly swelling larger. Several strips of court-plaster covered the cut on her temple. One cheek was scratched, and she was stiff and sore from many bruises.

"But not half so stiff as you'll be in the morning," Mrs. Appleton assured her, cheerfully. "All that side of your body that struck against the manger is black and blue."

"I think I'll go to bed," said the Little Colonel, faintly. "This day has been long enough, and I don't want anything else to happen to me. Fallin' through a trap-doah and havin' my mothah leave me is enough fo' one while. I think I need her moah than Aunt Jane does. You'll have to sleep with me to-night, Betty. I wouldn't stay down heah alone fo' anything."

It was very early to go to bed, scarcely more than half-past seven, when Betty blew out the candle and climbed in beside the Little Colonel. She lay for a long time, listening to the croaking of the frogs, thinking that Lloyd had forgotten her troubles in dreamland, until a mournful little voice whispered, "Say, Betty, are you asleep?"

"No; but I thought you were."

"I was, for a few minutes, but that dreadful false face of Molly's woke me up. I dreamed it was chasing me, and I seemed to be falling and falling, and somebody screamed at me '*Look out! The witches will catch you!*' It frightened me so that I woke up all a tremble. I know I am safe, here in bed with you, but I'm shaking so hard that I can't go to sleep again. Oh, Betty, you don't know how much I want my mothah! I'll nevah leave her again as long as I live. My head aches, and I'm so stiff and soah I can't tu'n ovah!"

"Do you want me to tell you a story?" asked Betty, hearing the sob in Lloyd's voice, and divining that her pillow had caught more than one tear under cover of the darkness.

"Oh, yes!" begged the Little Colonel. "Talk to me, even if you don't say anything but the multiplication table. It will keep me from hearin' those

dreadful frogs, and seein' that face in the dark. I'm ashamed to be frightened at nothing. I don't know what makes me such a coward."

"Maybe the fall was a sort of shock to your nerves," said Betty, comfortingly, reaching out to pat the trembling shoulders with a motherly air. "There, go to sleep, and I'll stay awake and keep away the hobgoblins. I'll recite the Lady Jane, because it jingles so beautifully. It goes like a cradle."

A little groping hand reached through the darkness and touched Betty's face, then buried itself in her soft curls, as if the touch brought a soothing sense of safety. In a slow, sing-song tone, as monotonous as the droning of a bee, Betty began, accenting every other syllable with a sleepy drawl.

"The *la*-dy *Jane* was *tall* and *slim*,
The *la*-dy *Jane* was *fair*.
Sir *Thomas* her *lord* was *stout* of *limb*,
His *cough* was *short* and his *eyes* were *dim*,
And he *wore* green *specs* with a *tortoise* shell *rim*,
And his *hat* was re-*mark*-ably *broad* in the *brim*,
And *she* was un-*common*-ly *fond* of *him*,
And *they* were a *lov*-ing *pair*.
And the *name* and the *fame* of this *knight* and his *dame*
Were *every*-where *hailed* with the *loud*-est ac-*claim*."

But it took more than the Lady Jane to put the restless little listener to sleep that night. Maud Muller was recited in the same sing-song measure, and Lord Ullin's daughter followed without a pause, till Betty herself grew sleepy, and, like a tired little mosquito, droned lower and lower, finally stopping in the middle of a sentence.

They woke in the morning, to hear thunder rumbling in the distance. Betty, peeping through the curtains, announced that the sky was gray with clouds, and she thought that it must surely begin to rain soon. Lloyd, so stiff and sore from the effects of her fall that she could scarcely move, sat up with a groan.

"Oh, deah!" she exclaimed. "What is there to do heah on rainy days? No books, no games, no piano! Mothah said that the lesson set fo' me to learn was patience, but I'd lose my mind, just sitting still in front of a clock and watching the minutes go by. I don't see how Job stood it."

"Job didn't do that way," said Betty, soberly, as she looked up from lacing her shoes. "They didn't have any clocks in those days, and besides, patience isn't just sitting still all day without fidgeting. It's putting up with whatever happens to you, without

making a fuss about it. The best way to do it is not to think about it any more than you can help."

"I'd like to know how I'm goin' to keep from thinkin' about my bruises and cuts," groaned the Little Colonel, limping stiffly across the room to look again in the little mirror, at her bandaged forehead, her scratched cheek, and her temple, criss-crossed with strips of court-plaster. "What *would* Papa Jack say if he could see me now?"

She repeated Betty's definition of patience to her reflection in the mirror, making a wry face as she did so. "'Puttin' up with whatevah happens to you, without makin' a fuss about it.' Well, I'll try, but it's mighty hard to do when one of the happenings is fallin' through a trap-doah, and gettin' as stiff and soah as I am."

She thought about the definition more than once during the long morning that followed; when the hash was too salty at breakfast, and the oatmeal was scorched; when Betty was busy in the spring-house, and she was left all alone for awhile with nothing to entertain herself with but the almanac and a week-old paper. The thunder, that had been only a low muttering over the distant hills when they awoke, was coming nearer, and the damp air was heavy with the approaching storm.

"I'll have one little run out-of-doahs befo' it begins to rain," thought Lloyd, and started up to skip across the porch; but her skipping changed to a painful walk as her aching muscles reminded her of her fall, and she limped slowly down the lane toward the gate.

A strong wind suddenly began lashing the cherry-trees that lined the lane, and sent a gust of dust and leaves into her face. She stopped a moment to rub her eyes, and as she did so something fluttering on the hedge-row broke loose from the thorns that held it, and came blowing toward her. It was something soft and gray, and it fluttered along uncertainly, like a bit of fleecy thistledown, as the wind bore it to her feet.

"Oh, it's mothah's gray veil!" she exclaimed. "It was on the back of the seat when she waved good-bye to me, and they were drivin' so fast it must have blown away."

She picked up the dainty piece of silk tissue, soft and filmy as a cloud, and held it against her cheek. Then she hurried into the house with it, lest some of the boys should see her and notice the tears in her eyes. But inside the dark closet, where she climbed to lay the veil on a shelf, the lonely feeling was too strong for her to overcome. Crouching down in a

corner, with her face hidden in the soft violet-scented veil, she cried quietly for a long time.

Then something came to her mind that had happened when she was only five years old, before she had gone to Locust to live. It was that first lonesome evening when she had been left to spend the night at her grandfather's, and she grew so homesick as twilight fell that she decided to run away. And while she stood with her hand on the latch of the great gate, peering through the bars at the darkening world outside, Fritz (the wisest little terrier that ever peeped through tangled bangs) found something in the dead leaves at her feet. It was a little gray glove that her mother had dropped, when she stooped to kiss her good-bye. Lloyd remembered how she had squeezed it, and cried over it, and fondled it as if it held the touch of her mother's hand, and then, baby though she was, she had tucked it into her tiny apron pocket as a talisman to help her be brave. Then she walked back to the house without another tear.

"That visit had a beautiful ending," thought Lloyd, tenderly folding the veil. "Then I had only Fritz for company, but now I have Betty. I'll just stop wishin' I could run away from the Cuckoo's Nest, and I'll have all the good times that I can get out of this visit."

She felt better now. The tears seemed to have washed away the ache in her throat. Bradley was calling her, and only stopping at the wash-stand a moment to bathe her red eyes, she went out to see what he wanted.

His freckled face was all alight with a beaming smile, as if he were the bearer of good news. His hands were behind his back, and as he came toward her he called out, in the pleasantest of voices, "Which will you take, Lloyd, right or left?"

Forgetting that Betty had cautioned her about his love of teasing, and remembering the apples he had brought her the day before, she answered, with a friendly smile, "I choose what's in the right hand."

"Then shut your eyes, and hold fast all I give you."

Squinting her eyelids tightly together, Lloyd held out her unsuspecting little hand, only to receive a squirming bunch of clammy, wriggling fishing worms. She gave a loud shriek, and wrung the hand that the worms had touched, as if it had been stung.

"Oo-ooh! Bradley Appleton! You horrid boy!" she cried. "How could you be so mean? There's nothing I *hate* like worms. I could touch a mouse or even a snake soonah than those bare crawly things! Oh, I'll nevah, nevah be able to get the feel

of them off my hands, even if I should scrub them a week. I don't mind things with feet, but the feel of the squirmin' is awful!"

Bradley laughed so loudly over the success of his joke, that Betty came out smiling to see what was the matter, and was surprised to see Lloyd marching indignantly into the house, her head held high and her face very red.

"Well, I didn't do anything but give her a handful of angleworms," said Bradley, in reply to Betty's demand for an explanation. "Molly heard her say that she despised worms, and that nothing could make her touch one or put it on a hook. I was just showing her for her own good that there is nothing to be afraid of in a harmless little fishing-worm, and she had to go off and get mad. Girls are such touchy things. They make me tired."

Long experience had taught Betty that the best thing to do, when Bradley was in a teasing mood, was to keep out of his way, so she turned without a word and went in search of Lloyd. As she did so, the rain that they had been expecting all morning came dashing against the window-panes in torrents. Suddenly it grew so dark one could scarcely see to read without lighting a lamp.

"Come up to my room, Lloyd," called Betty, stop-

ping at the parlour door, with Davy tagging behind her. "It's lighter up there, and I love to be close up under the roof when the rain patters on it."

"Wait till I finish washing my hands," answered Lloyd, looking up with a disgusted face. "Ugh! I can't wash away that horrid squirmin' feelin', even with a nail-brush."

As Davy climbed the stairs after them he caught Lloyd by the dress. "Say!" he exclaimed in a half whisper, "it was Molly that told Bradley to put those worms on you. She dared him to, and they're laughing about it now, down in the kitchen."

It was on the tip of Lloyd's tongue to say, "They're both of them mean, hateful things, and I'll get even with them if it takes all the rest of my visit to do it." But before the words could slip out she remembered the definition, "Putting up with anything that happens to you without making a fuss about it."

"There couldn't anything nastier happen than fishin'-worms," she said to herself, "so this must be one of the times I need patience the very most."

Although the lesson was remembered in time to keep her from getting into a rage, it did not put her into a good humour. It was a very unhappy little face that looked out of the gable window, against which the autumn rain was dashing. Her head

ached from all its bumps and bruises, and her eyes wore as forlorn an expression as if she were some unhappy Crusoe, cast away on a desert island with no hope of rescue.

Davy perched himself on the trunk and awaited developments. Betty looked around the room in search of something to brighten the dull day; but the bare walls offered no suggestion of entertainment. Lloyd's fingers drumming restlessly on the window-pane, and the patter of the rain on the roof, were the only sounds in the room.

"I wondah if it's rainin' where Joyce and Eugenia are," said the Little Colonel, after awhile, breaking the long silence.

"Oh, let's write to them," cried Betty, eagerly. "One can write East and one can write West, and we'll tell them all that has happened in the Cuckoo's Nest since we came back to it."

Davy slid off the trunk in silent disapproval when the writing material was brought out, and the girls began their letters. The scratching of the pens across the paper and the dismal dripping of the rain was too monotonous for him, and he felt forced to go below in search of livelier companionship.

CHAPTER VI.

MOLLY'S STORY.

THEY had been writing a long time, when the Little Colonel looked up with a mischievous smile. "Joyce will think that this is a wondahful place," she said. "I've told her all about my bein' chased by a Barley-bright witch, and how ugly she was, and what Davy said about her goin' through keyholes. It sounds so real when I read it ovah that I could half-way make myself believe that she is one. I'm goin' to slip across into her room now, and see if I can't find the broomstick that she rides around on at night. If there'd just be a black cat sittin' on her pillow, I could almost believe what Davy said about her hoodoo word. Wouldn't she be mad if she knew what was in this letter? I told Joyce how mean she'd acted about the fishin'-worms too, and how she's scowled at us evah since we came."

Betty looked up with a preoccupied smile, for she had long ago finished her letter to Eugenia and was busy with some verses that she was trying to write

about the rain. The rhymes were falling into place almost as easily and musically as the rain-drops tinkling down the eaves, and her face was flushed with the pleasure of it. She was so wrapped up in her own thoughts that she did not understand what Lloyd was saying, and smiled a reply without the faintest idea of what it was that she proposed to do.

Lloyd laid down her pen, and, tiptoeing across the narrow passage that divided Betty's room from Molly's, opened the door and looked in. She had thought that the parlour bedroom down-stairs was queer, and that Betty's room was pitifully bare and common, but such cheerlessness as this she had certainly never seen before, and scarcely imagined.

It was an attic-like room over the kitchen, with such a low sloping ceiling that she could touch it with her hand, except when she stood in the middle of the room. There was a rough, unpainted floor, a cot, a dry-goods box covered with newspaper, on which stood a tin basin and a broken-nosed water-pitcher. Some nails, driven along the wall, held a row of clothes, and a chair with both rockers broken off was propped against the wall. Lloyd looked around her with a shiver. The only bright spot in the room was a bunch of golden-rod in a bottle,

and the only picture, a page torn from an illustrated newspaper, and pinned to the wall.

Wondering what kind of a picture such a creature as the Barley-bright witch would choose to decorate her room, Lloyd walked across to examine it. It was the front page from an old *Harper's Weekly*. The date caught her eye first: December 25, 1897. And then she found herself looking into a room still more pitiful than the one in which she stood, for the pictured room was part of an old New York tenement, and sobbing in the corner was a ragged, half-starved little waif, heartbroken because Santa Claus had passed her by, and she had found an empty stocking on Christmas morning.

Lloyd could not see the face hidden in the tattered apron, which the disappointed little hands held up. She could not hear the sobs that she knew were shaking the thin little shoulders, but she felt the misery of the scene as forcibly as if the real child stood before her. As she stood and looked, she knew that if all the troubles and disappointments of her whole life could be put together, they would be as only a drop compared to the grief of the poor little creature in the picture.

"Oh, Betty!" she called. "Come heah quick! I want to show you something."

The distress in Lloyd's voice made Betty hurry across the passage with her pen in her hand, wondering what could be the matter.

"Look!" exclaimed Lloyd, pointing to the picture. "How can Molly keep such a thing in her room? Do you s'pose she was evah like that? It's enough to make her cry every time she looks at it."

"Maybe she used to be like that," said Betty, examining the picture carefully, and maybe she keeps it here to remind her how much better off she is now than she used to be."

"I can't see that her room is much nicer," said Lloyd, looking around with an expression of disgust.

"It always has been used as a sort of storeroom," explained Betty. "This is the first time I've been in here since I came back, and I didn't know how it had been fixed for Molly. Cousin Hetty hasn't any time or money to spend making it look nice. Besides, she is only in here for a little while. She is to have my room when I go away. If I'm abroad all winter, and with Joyce next summer, and at Locust going to school the year after, as godmother has planned, I suppose I'll never be back here again to really live. I'm going to make a new pincushion and a cover for my bureau, and put a white curtain at the window before I leave. Maybe it will look as fine to

Molly as my white and gold room did to me at the House Beautiful. It isn't any wonder she feels jealous of us, when she hasn't a single nice thing in the whole world."

"Maybe I oughtn't to have written such spiteful things about her to Joyce," said Lloyd, whose heart began to soften and whose conscience pricked as she turned again to the picture.

But even while they were planning the changes they would make in the gable room for Molly, there was a stealthy step on the stairs, and Molly herself stood in the door, glaring at them like an angry tigress.

"How *dare* you!" she cried, stamping her foot in a furious rage. "How dare you come in here spying on me and making fun of my things and looking at my picture! You sha'n't look at my little Dot when she is so miserable. You sha'n't put eyes on her again!"

With a white angry face she dashed past them, tore the picture from the wall, and with it held tightly against her threw herself face downward on the cot.

"We were not spying on you," began Lloyd, indignantly. "We were not making fun of your things!"

"I know better. Get out of this room, both of you! This minute!" cried Molly, lifting her white

face in which her angry eyes burned like flames. Then she buried her head in her pillow, sobbing bitterly: "If y-you were an or-orphan — and hadn't but one thing in the world, you wouldn't want p-people to come sp-spying on *you*, that way."

Puzzled and almost frightened at such an outburst, the girls retreated to the doorway, and then as she continued to storm at them they went back to Betty's room. They could hear her sobbing even with the door shut. Presently Betty said: "I'm going in there again, and see if I can find out what's the matter. I am an orphan, too, and maybe I can coax her to tell me, when she knows how sorry I am for her."

People wondered sometimes at Betty's way of walking into their hearts; but sympathy is an open sesame to nearly all gates, and sympathy was Betty's unfailing key. It was always ready in her loving little hand.

Presently, when Molly's wild burst of angry sobbing had subsided somewhat, Betty ventured back to her. Lloyd heard a low murmuring of voices, first Betty's and then Molly's, as one little orphan poured out her story to the other. It was nearly an hour before Betty came back to her room. Lloyd had written another letter while she waited, and now sat

leaning against the window-sill, listening to the monotonous drip-drop-drip-drop from a leaky spout above the window.

"Well, what was it?" she asked, eagerly, as Betty opened the door.

"Oh, you never heard anything so pitiful," exclaimed Betty, sitting down on her bed and drawing her feet up under her comfortably before she began. "It is just like a story in a book.

"Molly says that when she was little her father was a railroad conductor, and she and her mother and grandmother and baby sister lived in a little house at the edge of town. It was near enough the railroad track for them to wave to her father, from the front door, whenever his train passed. He could come home only once a week. She and Dot thought he was the best father anybody ever had, for he never came home without something in his pockets for them, and he rode them around on his shoulders and played with them all the time he was in the house. He was always bringing things to their mother, too, a pretty cup and saucer or a pot of flowers, or something to wear; and as for the old grandmother, she spent her time telling the neighbours how good her son was to her.

"But Molly says one summer they moved away

from the house by the railroad track and took a smaller one in town, where there wasn't any garden and trees, and where there wasn't even any grass, except a narrow strip in the front yard. Her father had lost his place as a conductor, and was out of work for a long time. By and by they sold their piano and the carpets and the nicest chairs. Then they moved again. This time it was to a cottage without even a strip of grass. The front door opened out on the pavement and there was no place for them to play except on the streets. Their father never brought anything home to them any more, and never played with them. They couldn't understand what made him so cross, or what made their mother cry so much, until one day she heard some of their neighbours talking.

"She and Dot were waiting in the corner grocery for a loaf of bread, and she heard one woman say to another, in a low tone, 'Those are Jim Conner's children, poor little kids. My man says he used to be one of the best conductors on the road, but he lost his job when he took to getting drunk every Saturday night. He's going down-hill now, fast as a man can go. Heaven only knows what'll become of his family if he doesn't put on the brakes soon.'

"Then Molly knew what was the matter, and she

didn't make her mother cry by asking any more questions when they moved again the next week. That time they had only two rooms up-stairs over a barber shop, and Molly's mother died that summer. Then her father drank harder than ever, and never brought any money home, and by fall they had sold nearly everything that was left, and moved into one room in an old tenement-house, up two flights of stairs.

"Their grandmother had to go away every morning to look for work. She was too old to wash, or she might have had plenty to do. Sometimes she got odd jobs of cleaning, and sometimes she made button-holes for a pants factory. It took nearly all the money she could make to pay the rent of that room, and often and often, Molly said, there were days when they had nothing but scraps of stale bread to eat. Sometimes there wasn't even that, and she and Dot would be so cold and hungry that they would huddle together in a corner and cry. She said it made her feel so awful to hear poor little Dot sobbing for something to eat, that she would have gone out on the streets and begged, but their grandmother always locked them up when she went away."

"What for?" interrupted Lloyd, who was listening with breathless attention.

"She was afraid that their father would come home

drunk and find them alone. He didn't live with them any more, but several times, before she began locking them up, he staggered in, and frightened them dreadfully. Their ragged clothes and their half-starved looks seemed to make him furious. It hurt his conscience, I suppose, and that made him want to hurt somebody. Molly says he beat them sometimes till the neighbours interfered. More than once he shut them up in a dark closet, trying to make them tell where their grandmother kept her money. They couldn't tell him, for she didn't have any money, but he kept them shut up in the dark, hours at a time.

"One night he came in crosser than they had ever seen him, and threw things around dreadfully. He struck his old mother in the face, beat Molly, and threw a stick of wood at little Dot. It just missed putting out her right eye, and made such a deep cut over it that they had to send for a doctor to sew it up. He said she would carry the scar all her life, and he could not see how the blow had missed killing her.

"It nearly broke the old grandmother's heart. She sat up all night, and Molly says she remembers that time like a dreadful dream. Half the time the old woman was rocking Dot in her arms, crying over her, and half the time she was walking the floor.

"Molly says that now, when she shuts her eyes at night, she can hear her saying, over and over, 'Oh, my Jimmy! My Jimmy! To think that my only child should come to this! Oh, my Jimmy! The baby boy that was my sunshine, how can it be that *you've* become the sorrow of my life!' Then she'd walk up and down the room as if she were crazy, calling out, 'But it's the drink that did it! It's the drink, and a curse be on everything that helps to bring it into the world.'

"Molly says that she looked so terrible, with her white hair streaming over her shoulders, and her eyes staring, that she hid her face in the bed-clothes. But she couldn't shut out the words. She shouted them so loud that the family in the next room couldn't sleep, and knocked on the wall for her to stop. But she only went on walking and wringing her hands and calling, 'A curse on all who buy and all who brew! A curse on every distiller! On every saloon-keeper! On every man who has so much as a finger in this business of death! May all the shame and the sin and the sorrow they have sown in other homes be reaped a hundredfold in their own!'

"I suppose it made such a strong impression on Molly, hearing her grandmother take on so terribly,

that she remembered every word, and will as long as she lives. She said the rain poured that night till it leaked down on the bed, and she and Dot had to snuggle up together at the foot, to keep dry. Her grandmother walked the floor till daylight. The neighbours complained of her, and said that her troubles had unsettled her mind, and that she would have to be sent some place to be taken care of. All she could talk about was the drink that had ruined her Jimmy, and the awful things she prayed would happen to anybody who had anything to do with making or selling whiskey.

"She couldn't work any longer, and they were almost starving. One day she was taken to the almshouse, and the family in the next room took care of Molly and Dot until arrangements could be made to send them to an orphan asylum. It was hard to get them into one, you know, because their father was living.

"They stayed several weeks with those people, and Molly helped take care of the baby, for she was a big girl, eleven years old, then. Dot was seven, but so little and starved that she looked scarcely half that old. She couldn't do much to help, but they sent her on errands sometimes.

"One day she went to the meat-shop around the

corner, and *she never came back.* Molly hunted in all the alleys and courtyards for her, until some one brought her a message from her father, that he had taken Dot away to another town. He didn't care what became of Molly, he said. She had been saucy to him, but no orphan asylum should have his baby. He'd hide her where she wouldn't be found in a hurry.

"Molly says she would have liked it at the asylum if Dot could have been with her, but because she couldn't it made her hate everything and everybody in the world. There was a big distillery in sight of her window. She could see the roof the first thing in the morning, when she opened her eyes, and the last thing at night. Many a time before she got out of bed she'd think of her grandmother's words and repeat them just like it was her prayers. She'd think 'It's drink that put me here, and it's what separated me from Dot,' and then she'd say, 'A curse on those who sell, and those who make it, and on every hand that helps to bring it into the world! Amen.'"

"How dreadful!" exclaimed the Little Colonel, with a shudder. "She is as bad as a heathen."

"But you can't wonder at it," said Betty. "We would have felt the same way in her place. Sup-

pose it was your Papa Jack that had been made a drunkard, and that he'd begin to be mean to you, and make so much trouble that godmother would die, and you'd have to leave the House Beautiful and be sent to an asylum, and all on account of the saloons. Wouldn't *you* hate them and everything that helped keep them going?"

Lloyd only shivered at the thought, without answering. It was not possible for her to suppose such a horrible thing about her beloved father, but she felt the justice of Betty's view.

"While she was at the asylum," continued Betty, "some one sent a pile of old magazines, and among them she found the picture that we saw. She says that it looks exactly like Dot, and that is the way she used to stand and cry sometimes when she was cold and hungry, and there wasn't anything in the house to eat. It makes her perfectly miserable whenever she looks at it, but it is so much like Dot that she can't bear to give it up. Now you see why she didn't like us. It didn't seem fair to her that we should have so much to make us happy, when she has so little. She has had a hard enough time to spoil anybody's disposition, I think."

Lloyd was in tears by this time, and reaching across the table for the letter she had written about

the Barley-bright witch, she began tearing it into pieces.

"Oh, if I'd only known," she said, "I never would have written those things about her. I'll write another one this afternoon, and tell Joyce all about her. Is she still crying in there, Betty?"

"No, she stopped before I left. I told her we would all try to find her little sister, and that I was sure godmother could do it, even if everybody else failed. But she didn't seem to think that there was much hope."

"Did you tell her about Fairchance?" asked Lloyd, "or Joyce's finding Jules's great-aunt Desiré, that time she went to the Little Sisters of the Poor?"

"No," said Betty.

"Then let me tell her," cried the Little Colonel starting up eagerly.

She ran on into Molly's room, while thoughtful Betty slipped down-stairs to offer her services in Molly's place, that she might listen undisturbed to Lloyd's tale of comfort, — all about Jonesy and his brother, and the bear, who had found a fair chance to begin life again, in the home that the two little knights built for them, in their efforts to "right the

wrong and follow the king." All about old great-aunt Desiré, who had been found in a pauper's home and brought back to her own again, through the Gate of the Giant Scissors, on Christmas Day in the morning.

"It is too good to be true," sighed Molly, when Lloyd had finished. "It might happen to some people, but it's too good to happen to me. It sounds like something out of a story-book."

"Most of the things in story-books had to happen first before they were written about," answered the Little Colonel. "You've got so many friends now that surely some of them will be able to do something to find her."

Presently Molly looked up, saying, in a hesitating way, "Several people have been good to me before, but I never thought about them doing it because they were my *friends*. I thought they treated me kindly just because they pitied me, and that made me cross."

Lloyd was turning the little ring that Eugenia had given her around on her finger, and something in the touch of the little lover's knot of gold recalled all that she had resolved about the "Road of the Loving Heart." It was the ring that made her say, gently, "You mustn't think that about Betty and me. We'll

be your really truly friends just as we are Joyce's and Eugenia's."

Then to Molly's great surprise the Little Colonel's pretty face leaned over hers an instant, and she felt a quick kiss on her forehead. She lay there a moment longer without speaking, and then sat up, a bright smile flashing across her tear-swollen face. "Somehow the whole world seems different," she cried. "It seems so queer to think I've really got *friends* like other people."

There was a warm glow in the Little Colonel's heart when she went back to Betty's room. The consciousness that she had carried comfort and sunshine into another's life brightened the rainy day until it no longer seemed dark and dreary. That comfortable consciousness was still with her in the afternoon, when she sat down to write another letter to Joyce, — a letter, not filled this time with her own mishaps and misfortunes, but so full of sympathy for Molly's troubles that no one who read it could fail to be touched and interested.

CHAPTER VII.

A FEAST OF SAILS.

Now ring your merriest tune, ye silver bells of the magic caldron. 'Tis a birthday feast that awakes your chiming, so make your key-note joy. And now if the little princes and princesses will thrust their curious fingers into the steam as the water bubbles again, it will take them far away from the Cuckoo's Nest. They will see the village of Plainsville, Kansas, and the little brown house where the Ware family lived.

The day that the Little Colonel's letter reached Joyce was Holland's tenth birthday. One would not have dreamed that there was a party of ten boys in the parlour that bright September afternoon, for the shutters were closed, and every blind tightly drawn. Jack had darkened the room to give them a magic lantern exhibition, while Joyce was spreading the table under an apple-tree in the side yard. Mary, her funny little braids with their big bows of blue

ribbon continually bobbing over her shoulders, was helping to carry out the curious dishes from the house that had taken all morning to prepare.

There was never much money to spend in entertainments in the little brown house, but birthdays never passed unheeded. Love can always find some way to keep the red-letter days of its calendar. Joyce and her mother had planned a novel supper for Holland and his friends, thinking it would make a merry feast for them to laugh over now, and a pleasant memory by and by, when three score years had been added to his ten. Looking back on the day when somebody cared that it was his birthday, and celebrated it with loving forethought, would kindle a glow in his heart, no matter how old and white-haired he might live to be.

The little mother could not take much time from her sewing, but she suggested and helped with the verses, and came out when the table was nearly ready, to add a few finishing touches.

A Feast of Sails, Joyce called it, saying that, if Cinderella's godmother could change a pumpkin into a gilded coach, there was no reason why they should not transform an ordinary luncheon into a fleet of boats, for a boy whose greatest ambition was to be a naval officer, and who was always talking about the sea.

These were the invitations, printed in Jack's best style, and decorated by Joyce with a little water-colour sketch of a ship in full sail:

Please come, hale and hearty,
To Holland Ware's party,
September, the twenty-first day,
And partake in a bunch
Of a queer birthday lunch,
And afterward join in a play.
The things which we'll eat
Will be boats, sour and sweet,
With maybe an entrée of whales.
Will you please to arrive
Awhile before five,
The hour that this boat-luncheon sails.

The invitations aroused great interest among all Holland's friends, and every boy was at the gate long before the appointed hour, curious to see the "boats sour and sweet" that could be eaten. But even Holland did not know what was in store for them. Joyce had driven him out of the kitchen while she was preparing the surprise, and would not begin to set the table until Jack had marshalled every boy into the dark parlour and begun his magic lantern show. The baby was with them, a baby no longer, he stoutly declared, as he had that day been promoted from kilts to his first pair of trousers, and

he insisted on being called henceforth by his own name, Norman.

As he and Jack were to be added to the party of ten, the table was set for twelve. It was a gay sight when everything was ready. From the mirror lake in the middle, on which a dozen toy swans were afloat, arose a lighthouse made of doughnuts. It was surmounted by a little lantern from which floated a tiny flag. At one end of the table a huge watermelon cut lengthwise, and furnished with masts and sails of red crêpe paper, looked like a brig just launched. At the other end rose the great white island of the birthday cake, with its ten red candles. All down the sides of the table was a flutter of yellow and green and white and blue sails, for at each plate was a little fleet sporting the colours of the rainbow.

It had been an interesting task to make the dressed eggs into canoes, to cut the cheese into square rafts, and hollow out the long cucumber pickles into skiffs, fitting sails or pennons to each broomstraw mast. It had been still more interesting to change a bag of big fat raisins into turtles, by poking five cloves and a bit of stem into each one for the head, legs, and tail.

Joyce took an artistic pleasure in arranging the orange boats around the table. She had made them

by cutting an orange in two, and putting a stick of peppermint candy in each half for a mast, and they had a foreign, Chinese look with their queer sails, flaming with little red-ink dragons. Jack had drawn them. Here and there, over the sea of white tablecloth, she had scattered candy fish and the raisin turtles. At the last moment there were potato chips to be heated, and islands of sandwiches and jelly to distribute, and the can of sardines to open. Mary had insisted on having the sardines to personate whales, and she herself served one to each guest on a little shell-shaped plate belonging to her set of doll dishes. It had taken so long to prepare all these boats, that Joyce had had no time to decorate the menu cards as she had planned, but Jack had cut them in the shape of an anchor, and stuck a fish-hook through each one for a souvenir. This was what was printed on them:

MENU.

An egg Canoe
A Cheese Raft too.

A Skiff of pickle
Your taste to tickle.

Turtles galore,
Found alongshore.

Entrée of Whales
(A la sardine tails).

Chips in a pile, and
A Sandwich Island.

The Brig *Watermelon*
With sails all a-swellin'.

An orange boat last
With a candy mast.

The Island of Cake
With fish from Sweet Lake.

Mary gave the signal when everything was ready, a long toot on an old tin whistle that sounded like a fog-horn. She blew it through the keyhole of the parlour door, expecting a speedy answer, but was not prepared for the sensation her summons created. The door flew open so suddenly that she was nearly taken off her feet, and the boys fell all over each other in their race for the table. When they were all seated, Norman, standing up at the foot of the table, repeated the rhyme which Joyce had carefully taught him:

> "Heave ho, my hearties, let these boats
> Sail down the Red Sea of your throats."

"They're surely obeying orders," said Mary, mournfully, a few minutes later, when she hurried into the kitchen for another Sandwich Island. "They're swallowing up those boats quicker'n the real Red Sea swallowed up old Pharaoh and all his chariots. There'll be nothing left for us but the rinds and the broom-straws."

"Oh, yes, there will," said Joyce, cheerfully, opening the pantry door and showing her three plates on the lower shelf. "There is our supper. I put it aside, for boys are like grasshoppers. They'll eat everything in sight. I didn't take time to put sails

in my boats or in mother's, but you've got one of every kind just like the boys, even to a menu-card with a fish-hook in it."

There was a broad smile on Mary's beaming little face as she surveyed her part of the feast, and popping one of the fat raisin-turtles into her mouth, she hurried back to her duties as waitress. Joyce followed to pass around the birthday cake, telling each boy to blow out a candle as he took a slice, and to make a birthday wish.

Just as she finished there was a click of the gate-latch, and one of her schoolmates came up the path. It was Grace Link, one of her best friends, yet Joyce wished she had not happened in at that particular time.

Grace had a way of looking around her with a very superior air. It may have been due to her effort to keep her eye-glasses in position, but Joyce found it irritating at times. The glances made her feel how shabby the little brown house must look in comparison to the Links' elegant home, and she resented Grace's apparent notice of the fact.

"In just a minute, Grace," she called, thinking she would pass the cake around once more, and leave the boys to finish quietly by themselves. But she did not have a chance to do that. With a whoop as

of one voice, each boy started up, grabbing another slice of cake in one hand as he passed the plate, and all the candy fish he could scoop up with the other, and was off for a noisy game of hum-bum in the back yard.

"My gracious! what a noisy lot," exclaimed Grace, recognising her own small brother among them, and making mental note of a lecture she meant to give him after awhile.

"Oh, you ought to have seen how beautiful everything looked when they sat down," cried Mary, noticing Grace's critical glances, as she surveyed the wreck they had made of the table. "They've eaten up the lighthouse all but the lantern and the flag, and the watermelon ship was *so* pretty. Here's what the little boats looked like." She dashed into the pantry for her own gay little fleet of egg and orange and pickle boats with their many-coloured sails.

"How cunning!" said Grace, looking admiringly from the boats to the row of raisin-turtles. "But what a lot of time and trouble you all must have taken for those kids. Do you think boys appreciate it? I don't."

"My brothers do," said Joyce, stoutly. "We can't afford to have ices and fine things from the

confectioner's, so we have to think up all sorts of odd surprises to take their place. Mother began it long ago when Jack and I were little, and she gave us our first Valentine tea. She said it was no more trouble to cut the cookies and sandwiches heart-shaped than to make them round, and it took very little time to decorate the table to look like a lace-paper valentine, but it made a world of difference in our enjoyment. Jack and I have dozens of bright spots to remember because she made gala days of all our birthdays and holidays, and it's no more than right that we should do it for Mary and Holland and the baby, now that she is so busy."

"We have something for every month in the year," chimed in Mary, "counting our five birthdays and Washington's, and New Year and Decoration Day and Christmas and Hallowe'en and Valentine and Thanksgiving."

"There are more than that," added Joyce, "for there's always the Fourth of July picnic, you know, and the eggs and rabbits and flowers at Easter."

"Yes, and April fool's day," Mary called out triumphantly after them, as the two girls walked slowly toward the house. "That makes fifteen."

"Can't you go over to Elsie Somers's with me, Joyce?" asked Grace. "That's what I stopped by

for. It is only half-past five. I want to look at the centrepiece she is embroidering before I begin mine, and ask her about the stitch. Then I can begin it this evening after supper."

"Oh, I don't believe I can," answered Joyce, sitting wearily down on the doorstep, and making room for Grace beside her. "There's all that mess to clean up, and the boys will be coming in soon when it begins to get dark, for their bonfire stories. Do you see that enormous pile of leaves over there? We're going to have a jolly big bonfire after awhile, and sit around it telling stories. That is Holland's idea, and part of our way of keeping birthdays is to let the one who celebrates choose what he would like to do."

"*Hum, bum! Here I come!*" shouted several voices from the stable roof and alley fence, and Jack repeated it at the top of his voice, as he dashed around the corner of the house.

"Here, Joyce," he cried, pitching a letter toward her. "It came in the last mail, and I forgot to give it to you when I came back from the post-office. Just thought of it," and off he went again.

"It is from the Little Colonel," said Joyce, in a pleased tone. "Don't you want to hear it?"

Grace, who had heard so much about the happen-

ings at the house party that she almost felt as if she had been one of the guests, promptly settled herself to listen, and at Joyce's call, Mrs. Ware, who was still stitching beside the dining-room window, laid down her sewing, and came out to be part of the interested audience.

"Oh, goody! Betty has written, too," said Joyce, as she unfolded the closely written pages. "I've wondered so often what Lloyd would think of life at the Cuckoo's Nest, and if it would seem the same to Betty after her visit at Locust."

But there was nothing of the Little Colonel's experience, in either letter. Not a word about Aunt Jane's illness, or the game of barley-bright, or the trap-door accident. They had just come from listening to Molly's pitiful story, and both letters were full of it. The story-telling gift, that was to make Betty famous in after years, showed in the pathetic little tale she wrote Joyce, and so real did she make the scene that Joyce could scarcely keep a tremble out of her voice as she read it aloud.

"Wouldn't you love to see the picture that looks so much like Molly's little lost sister?" asked Mary, drawing a deep breath when the letter was done.

"Maybe we've got it at home," said Grace, eagerly. "We've taken the *Harper's Weekly* for years, and

there is a pile of them in the attic. Some of them have been lost or torn up, but if I can find the picture I'll bring it over. What did Betty say is the date of that number?"

"December twenty-fifth, ninety-seven," said Joyce, referring to the letter.

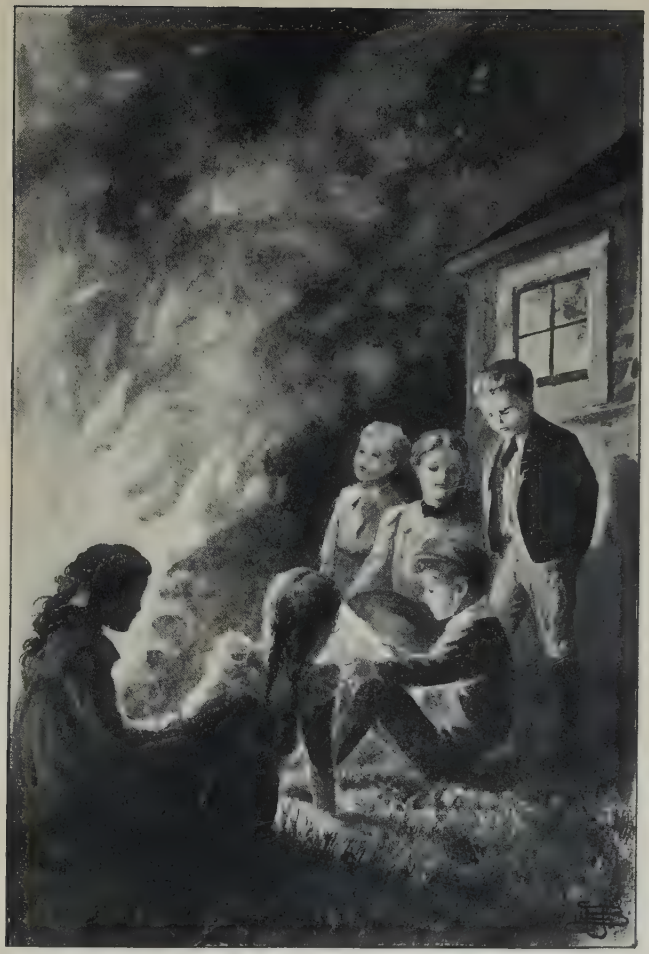
"Well, as you can't go over to Elsie's with me now, I'll wait till some other time. I'll go home now and look for that picture before dark."

"Come back in time for the bonfire," said Joyce cordially. "We have some fine stories ready."

"All right," responded Grace. "I'd love to."

"In the meantime we'll clear away the wreck, and eat our supper," said Joyce, as Grace went down the path and Mary followed the little mother into the pantry. They had just hung up the last tea towel and called Jack to light the bonfire, when Grace came back. She had the picture with her, and they looked long and earnestly at the little bunch of misery, sobbing in the corner.

"What if Dot's father has brought her out West!" exclaimed Mary, impulsively, as she continued to gaze at the forlorn little figure. "What if she should come to our house begging some day, and we should find her! Wouldn't it be grand? and wouldn't Molly and the girls be glad?"



"THE PICTURE PASSED AROUND THE CIRCLE."

"It makes me want to cry," said Joyce. "If I were rich I'd go out and hunt for all the poor little children like this that I could find, and do something to make them happy. Surely somebody of all the thousands who have seen that picture must have been moved to pity by it. No telling how much good that artist has done, by making people see some of the misery in the world that they can help. That is the kind of an artist I hope to be some day."

There were many stories told that evening around the birthday bonfire, which Jack kept ablaze, not only with leaves, but with pine cones and hickory knots. Giants and ghosts and hobgoblins, Indians and burglars and wild beasts, took their turns in the thrilling tales. But none made such a profound impression as the story of Molly's little lost sister, who perhaps at that very moment was locked in a dark closet by a drunken father, or sobbing herself to sleep, bruised and hungry. For one reason, it was real, and for another, the picture passed around the circle in the light of the glowing bonfire appealed to every child heart there.

"I wish the Giant Scissors were real," said Holland, referring to his favourite tale. "They'd find her. Joyce, what would you have to say to them to make them go in search?"

"Giant Scissors, rise in power!
Find little Dot this very hour!

And then they would go rushing away over mountains and dales," continued Joyce, who knew how greatly Holland enjoyed these variations of his favourite story. "Through streets and through alleys they'd go, through mansions and tenements until they found her and brought her back to Molly. Then, hand in hand, the big sister and the little one would follow the Scissors back to the home of Ethelred, because, like him, the only kingdom that they crave is the kingdom of a loving heart and a happy fireside. There would be feasting and merrymaking for seventy days and seventy nights, with the Scissors keeping guard at the portal of Ethelred, so that only those who belong to the kingdom of loving hearts and gentle hands might enter in."

Strangely moved by the story, little Norman got up from his seat and ran to Joyce, burying his head in her lap. "I hope I'll never be losted from *my* big sister," he cried, his voice quivering, despite the fact that he no longer wore kilts.

"Me, too," said Holland, sliding along the bench a little closer to her. "Fellows that haven't got any sisters to get up birthday parties for 'em and everything don't know what they miss."

Joyce looked over at Grace with a smile that seemed to say, "What did I tell you? These kids, as you call them, do appreciate what their sisters do for them."

Long after the bonfire was out and the birthday guests had departed, Holland turned restlessly on his pillow. The many boats he had eaten may have had something to do with his restlessness, but the thought of the lonely little child for whom Molly was grieving was still in his mind, when his mother looked in an hour later, to see if all was well for the night.

"I'm thankful for the party," he announced unexpectedly, as she bent over him, "and I'm thankful for most everything I can think of, but I'm most thankfullest because we aren't any of us in this house lost from each other."

"Please God you may say that on all your birthdays," whispered his mother, kissing him. Then she went away with the light, and silence reigned in the little brown house.

CHAPTER VIII.

EUGENIA JOINS THE SEARCH.

City towers rise now in the steam of the bubbling caldron, smoky chimney tops and high roof gardens. The clang and roar and traffic of crowded streets jangle through the silver chiming of the magic bells.

Eugenia Forbes, sitting near an open window in one of the handsomest apartments of the Waldorf-Astoria, heard none of the city's noise, saw nothing of the panorama in the restless streets below. The bell-boy had just brought her a letter, and she was reading it aloud to her maid. Patient old Eliot had taken such a deep interest in all that belonged to Lloydsboro Valley since their journey to Locust, that it was a pleasure to confide in her. Even if Eugenia had had any one else to confide in, she could have found no one who had her interest at heart more than this sensible, elderly woman, who had taken care of her for so many years.

Eugenia had not gone back to boarding-school as a regular pupil. It had scarcely seemed worth while, since she was to leave so soon for her trip abroad. But Riverdale Seminary, being in the suburbs, was not such a great distance from the hotel but that she could go out every morning for her French lesson. Knowing that she would soon have practical use for the language, she was doing extra work in French, and taking a greater interest in it than she had ever shown before in any study.

If the three girls who had been her devoted friends the year before had come back to Riverdale at the beginning of the term, she would have insisted on taking her place in the boarding-hall as a regular pupil, in order to be with them as long as possible. But the summer vacation had brought many changes. The day that Eugenia reached New York on her return from the house party, a letter had come saying that Molly Blythe would never be back at the school. There had been an accident on the mountain where she had gone to spend the summer with her family. A runaway team, a wild dash down the mountainside, and the merry picnic had ended in a sad accident. She was lying now in a long, serious illness that would either leave her a cripple for life, or take her away in a little while

from the devoted family that was nearly distracted by the thought of losing her.

Kell, still in the Bermudas, was not coming back to school until after Christmas, and Fay, while she still called Eugenia her dearest, divided her affections with a blonde girl from Ohio. They had passed the summer on the same island in the St. Lawrence, and Eugenia felt that her place was taken by this stranger.

With Molly and Kell away, and Fay so changed, Eugenia would have lost all interest in the school, had it not been that she wanted to acquire as much French as possible before going abroad. In most things she was not so overbearing and thoughtless in her treatment of poor old Eliot, since her visit to Locust. The ring she wore was a daily reminder of the Road of the Loving Heart that she was trying to leave behind her in everybody's memory. But Eliot still found her patience sorely tried at times. Missing the girls at school, Eugenia was lonely, and wished a hundred times a day that she were back at the house party. Sometimes she grumbled and moped until the atmosphere around her was as gloomy and depressing as a London fog.

"Nothing to do is a dreadful complaint," Eliot had said a few moments before the boy brought up

the letter. "You break one of the commandments every day you live, Miss Eugenia."

"How can you say such a thing?" demanded Eugenia, indignantly. "I don't lie or steal or murder, or do any of those things it says not to."

"It isn't any of the 'thou shalt nots,'" said Eliot, determined to speak her mind, now that she had started. "It is a *shalt*. 'Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work.' It is plain talk, Miss Eugenia, but there's nobody else to say it, and I feel that it ought to be said. More than three-fourths of your life you are miserable because you are doing nothing but grumbling and trying to kill time. You needn't be unhappy at all if you'd look around you and see some of the world's work lying around waiting for just such hands as yours to take hold of it."

"Oh, don't be so preachy!" pouted Eugenia, impatiently.

It was just at this point that the Little Colonel's letter was brought in, and the sight of the familiar handwriting made Eugenia's face brighten as if by magic.

"One from Betty, too," she cried, as a second closely written sheet dropped into her lap. Then forgetting her impatience with Eliot's preaching, she

began reading aloud the news from the Cuckoo's Nest. It was the same pathetic little tale that had touched the hearts of the birthday banqueters, circled around the glowing bonfire, and it moved Eugenia to pity, just as it had moved all who listened at the little brown house.

Eugenia folded up the letters, and slipped them back into the envelope. "If I were down there at the Cuckoo's Nest with Lloyd and Betty, there would be something for me to do. I'd find Molly's sister even if I had to spend all my year's allowance to employ a detective. Poor, lonesome little thing! I've taken a fancy to that girl. Maybe it is on account of her name being the same as Molly Blythe's. Even for no other reason than that I would be glad to help her."

"You don't have to go travelling to find lonely people, Miss Eugenia," said Eliot, who seemed to have much on her mind that afternoon, and a determination to share it with Eugenia. "All the aching hearts don't belong to little orphans, and some of the loneliest people in the world touch elbows with you every day."

"Who, for instance?" demanded Eugenia, unbelievingly. "I never saw them." Then, without waiting for an answer, she sprang up and glanced

into the mirror, and gave a few hasty touches to her hair and belt. "Bring me my hat, Eliot, and get into your bonnet. I'm going out to Riverdale. I'm sure I can find the picture they wrote about somewhere in the seminary library. They always save the old files of illustrated papers. I'm wild to see what that picture looks like that Molly made such a fuss about, and it will give me some amusement for the afternoon."

Little Miss Gray, the librarian at the Riverdale Seminary, looked up in surprise when Eugenia came rustling into the reading-room an hour later. It was the first time she had been in that term. It was a half-holiday, and up to that time no one had come in all the afternoon. Sitting by the window, cataloguing new books, Miss Gray had looked out from time to time, wishing that she, too, could have a half-holiday, and that she could change places with some of the care-free schoolgirls outside on the campus. She could see them strolling along the shady avenues by twos and threes and fours, never one alone. The sight made her feel even more lonely than usual. She looked up eagerly at the sound of the approaching footsteps, glad of any companionship, but shrank back timidly when she saw who was rustling toward her. Eugenia had always had such a

supercilious air in asking for a book, that she disliked to wait on her.

But to-day Eugenia came forward so intent on her errand that she forgot to be haughty, and asked for the old volume of *Harper's Weeklies* as eagerly as a little girl asking for a picture-book.

"That's the date," she said, handing Miss Gray a slip of paper. "Oh, I do hope you have it. You see the girls wrote such an interesting account of the little waif that I'm anxious to have the picture. It will be so nice to know that I'm looking at the same thing they saw in Molly's room.

"What a little morsel of misery!" she exclaimed, as Miss Gray opened the volume. "Isn't it pitiful? I never would have imagined that a real child could be so forlorn and miserable as this if the girls hadn't written about it. I thought such tales were made up by newspapers and magazines, just for something to write about."

Before she realised that she was taking the little librarian into her confidence, she was pouring out the story of Molly and Dot as if she were talking to one of the girls. When she finished Miss Gray turned her head away, but Eugenia saw two tears splash down on the table.

"Excuse my taking it so much to heart," said

Miss Gray, with a smile, as she wiped away the tell-tale drops, "but it seems so real to me that I couldn't help it. I'm like the little lost sister, you know. Not ragged and torn and poverty-stricken like the waif in the picture, for this position gives me all the comforts of life, but I'm just as much alone in the world as she. When I am busy I never think of it; but sometimes the thought sweeps over me like a great overwhelming wave, — I'm all alone in this big, strange city, only a drop in the bucket, with nobody to care whether I fare ill or well."

Eugenia did not know how to answer. She thought this must be one of the people whom Eliot meant, who touched elbows with her every day. Stirred by a great pity and a desire to comfort this gentle-faced little woman whose big blue eyes were as appealing as a baby's, and whose voice was as mournful as a dove's, Eugenia stood a moment in awkward silence. She wished that Betty could be there to say the right thing at the right time, as she always did, or that, better still, she had Betty's way of comforting people. Then a thought came to her like an inspiration.

"Oh, Miss Gray! Maybe if you have so much sympathy for the little lost child, you'd take an interest in helping me find her. Nobody knows

where her father took her. He sent word that he had left Louisville, and there is no telling where he has drifted. They are as likely to be here in New York as anywhere. Maybe if we went around to all the orphanages and hospitals and free kindergartens we could find some trace of her. Papa won't let me go out in the city alone, and Eliot is such a stick about going to strange places. She always loses her head and gets flustered and makes a mess of everything. Oh, *would* you mind going?"

"Any day after four o'clock," exclaimed Miss Gray eagerly, "and on Wednesdays the library closes at one."

"We'll begin next Wednesday," said Eugenia. "Come and take lunch with me at the Waldorf, and we can get an early start. Oh, I'll be so much obliged to you."

Before Miss Gray could say anything more, she had rustled out into the hall where Eliot sat waiting. The little librarian was left to clasp her hands in silent delight over the thought of such a lark as a lunch at the Waldorf and an afternoon's outing with the wealthiest and most exclusive girl in the Seminary.

"We are on the track, too," wrote Eugenia to Betty, some time after. "Miss Gray and I are

playing private detective on the trail of little Dot. We haven't found any trace of her yet, but we're haunting all sorts of places where we think there is any prospect of coming across her. We have found plenty of other children who need help, and papa gave me a big check last night to use for a little cripple that we became interested in. Miss Gray is lovely. We've been to several things together, a matinee and a concert and an art exhibition. I showed her my ring the day she was here to lunch, and told her all about the time when you were blind and what you said to me about the Road of the Loving Heart. And she said, 'Tell that blessed little Betty that she has given me an inspiration for life. Instead of thinking of my own loneliness I shall begin to think more of other people's and to leave a memory behind me, too, as enduring as Tusitala's.' "

One other person took the trouble to hunt up an old file of papers, and find the picture like the one pinned on Molly's wall. That was Mrs. Sherman. The morning that Lloyd's letter came, she happened to be passing the city library, and went in to ask for it. The sight of the poor little creature haunted her all morning, and remembering Molly's sullen

face, she longed to do something to give it a happier expression. That afternoon she went down to an art store to choose a picture for Lloyd to hang in Molly's room beside the pitiful little newspaper clipping. It was a picture of the Good Shepherd, carrying in his arms a little stray lamb that had wandered away from the shelter of the sheepfold.

CHAPTER IX.

LEFT BEHIND.

EVERY evening for a week, at the Cuckoo's Nest, a fire had been kindled on the sitting-room hearth, for the autumn rains made the nights chilly. Here until half-past eight the boys could play any game they chose. Hop-scotch left chalk marks on the new rag carpet, and tag upset the furniture as if a cyclone had swept through the room, but never a word of reproof interrupted their sport, no matter how boisterous. Lloyd wondered sometimes that the roof did not tumble in around their ears when she and Betty and Molly joined the five boys in a game of blind man's buff.

"It is nice to have old furniture and stout rag carpets," she confided to Betty, in a breathless pause of the game. "We couldn't romp in the house this way at Locust. I like the place now, it doesn't seem a bit queah. I wouldn't care if mothah would write for us to stay heah anothah week."

But the summons to leave came next day. A

howl went up from all the little Appletons as the letter was read aloud. It had been the most exciting week of their lives, for Betty and the Little Colonel were on the friendliest terms with Molly, and the three together introduced new games into the Cuckoo's Nest with an enthusiasm that made the evening playtime a delight. The charades and tableaux and private theatricals were something to enjoy with keen zest at the moment, and dream of for weeks afterward.

"We will have one more jolly old evening together, anyhow," said Bradley. "I'll go out and get the firewood now." But when supper was over, and the two trunks stood in a corner, packed and strapped for their morrow's journey, nobody seemed in a mood for romping. The boys squatted on the hearth-rug as solemnly as Indians around a council-fire. As the shadows danced on the ceiling, Betty reached down from the low stool where she sat, to stroke the puppy stretched across her feet.

"What do you all want me to bring you from Europe?" she asked, playfully. "Pretend that I could bring you anything you wanted. Only remember the story of Beauty and the Beast, and don't anybody ask for a white rose. Molly, you are the oldest, you begin, and choose first."

Molly's gray eyes gazed wistfully into the embers. "Oh, you know that there is only one thing in the whole world that I ever wish for, and that is Dot. But of course she isn't in Europe."

"You don't know," interrupted Lloyd. "I've read of stranger things than that. I have a story at home about a boy that was kidnapped, and yeahs aftah he was found strollin' around in a foreign country with a band of gypsies. They'd taken him across the ocean with them."

"And there's a piece in my Fourth Reader," added Scott, eagerly, "about a child that was stolen by Indians when she was so young that she soon forgot how to talk English. She grew up to look just like a squaw. When the tribe was captured, her own mother did not recognise her. Her mother was an old white-haired woman then. But there was a queer kind of scar that had always been on the girl's arm, and when her mother saw that she knew it was her daughter, and she began to sing a song that she used to sing when she rocked her children to sleep. And the girl remembered it, and it seemed to bring back all the other things she had forgotten, and she ran up to her mother and put her arms around her."

"Dot has a scar," said Molly. "I could tell her

anywhere by that mark over her eye where the stick of wood hit her."

"S'pose Betty should find her somewhere abroad," said Lloyd, her eyes shining like stars at the thought. "S'pose they'd be driving along in Paris, and a little flower girl would come up with a basket of violets, and Eugenia would say, 'Oh, papa, please stop the carriage. I want some of those violets.' And while they were buying them Betty would talk to the little flower girl, and find out that she was Dot. Of co'se Cousin Carl would take her right into the carriage, and they'd whirl away to the hotel, and aftah they'd bought her a lot of pretty clothes they'd take her travellin' with them, and finally bring her back to America just as if it were in a fairy tale."

"Or Eugenia might find her in New York before we leave," suggested Betty. "You know she wrote that she is hunting, and that her father promised to ask the police force to look, too."

"Joyce is lookin', too," said Lloyd. "Dot is as apt to wandah west as east. There's so many people interested now in tryin' to find her. I do wondah who'll be the one."

"Godmother, most likely," said Betty. "Wouldn't it be lovely if she should? Suppose she'd find her about Christmas time, and she'd send word to Molly

to hang up two stockings, because she was going to send her a present so big that it wouldn't go into one. And Christmas morning Molly would run down here to the chimney where she'd hung them, and there would be Dot standing in her stockings."

"Oh, *don't!*" said Molly, imploringly, with a little choke in her voice. "You make it seem so real that I can't bear to talk about it any more."

There was silence in the room for a little space, and only the shadows moved as the flames leaped and flickered on the old hearthstone. Then Lloyd, leaning forward, took hold of one of Betty's long brown curls.

"Tell us a story, Tusitala," she said, coaxingly. "It will be the last one before we go away."

"Why did you call her that?" asked the inquisitive Bradley.

"Tusitala? Oh, that means tale-teller, you know. That is the name the Samoan chiefs gave to Robert Louis Stevenson when he went to live on their island, and that is the name we gave Betty when we thought she was going blind, the time we all had the measles."

"Why?" asked Bradley again.

"Because mothah said Betty writes stories so well now, that she will be known as the children's Tusi-

tala some day. Besides, she told us the tale about the Road of the Loving Heart, and Eugenia gave us each a ring to help us remembah it. See? They are just alike."

She laid her hand against Betty's a moment, to compare the little twists of gold, each tied in a lover's knot, and then slipped hers off, passing it around the circle, that each might see the name "Tusitala" engraved inside. "Tell them about it, Betty," she insisted.

"There isn't much to tell," began Betty, clasping her hands around her knees. "Only Stevenson was so good to those poor old Samoan chiefs, visiting them when they were put in prison, and treating them so kindly in every way he could think of, that they called him their white brother. They wanted to do something to show their appreciation, for they said, 'The day is not longer than his kindness.' They had heard him wish for a road across part of the island, so they banded together and began to dig. It was hard work, for the heat was terrible there in the tropics, and they were weak from being in prison so long; but they worked for days and days, almost fainting. When it was done, they set up an inscription over it, calling it the Road of the Loving Heart that they had built to last for ever."

Betty paused a moment, twisting the little ring on her finger, and then repeated what she had confessed to Joyce, the afternoon that she thought she must be blind all the rest of her life.

"I wanted to build a road like that for godmother. Of course I couldn't dig one like those chiefs did, and she wouldn't have wanted it even if I could; but I thought maybe I could leave a memory behind me of my visit, that would be like a smooth white road. You know, remembering things is like looking back over a road. The unpleasant things that have happened are like the rocks we stumble over. But if we have done nothing unpleasant to remember, then we can look back and see it stretched out behind us, all smooth and white and shining.

"So, from the very first day of my visit, I tried to leave nothing behind me for her memory to stumble over. Not a frown or a cross word or a single disobedience. Nothing in all my life ever made me so happy as what she said to me the day I left Locust. I knew then that I had succeeded."

There was nothing preachy about Betty. She did not apply the story to her hearers, even in the tone in which she told it; but the silence that followed was uncomfortable to one squirming boy at least.

Bradley remembered the fishing-worms, and was in

haste to change the subject. "Say, Betty, what are you going to do with Bob when you go away?"

"I have been trying for some time to make up my mind," said Betty. "First I thought I would take him back to Locust, and let him stay with his brothers; but I'll be away so long that he won't know me when I come back, and this afternoon I decided to give him to Davy."

"Oh, really, truly, Betty?" cried the child, tumbling forward at her feet in a quiver of delight, for he had loved the frolicsome puppy at first sight, and had kept it with him every waking moment since it came.

"Really, truly," she repeated, picking up the puppy and dropping him into Davy's arms. "There, sir! Go to your new master, you rascal, and remember that your name isn't Bob Lewis any longer. It is Bob Appleton now."

Davy squeezed the fat puppy so close in his arms that his beaming face was nearly hidden by the big bow of yellow ribbon. He had never been so happy in all his life. The road that Betty had left in her godmother's memory was not the only one that stretched out white and shining behind her. No matter how long she might be gone from the Cuckoo's Nest, or how the years might pile up between them,

in Davy's heart she would be the dearest memory of his childhood. With Bob she had given him its crowning joy, a reminder of herself, to live and move and frisk beside him; to keep pace with every step, and to bring her to his loving remembrance with every wag of its stumpy tail, and every glance of its faithful brown eyes.

Again it was early morning, with dew on the meadows, as it had been when Betty first ventured out into the world. Now she fared forth on another and a longer pilgrimage, but this time there was no lonely sinking of the heart when she waved good-bye to the group on the porch. She was sorry to leave them, but the Little Colonel was with her, her godmother was to meet them at the junction, and just beyond was the wonderland of the old world, through which Cousin Carl was to be her guide.

It was one o clock when they reached Louisville. The afternoon was taken up in shopping, for there were many things that Betty needed for her voyage. But by six o'clock the new steamer trunk, with all the bundles, was aboard the suburban train, and Betty, with the check in her purse, followed her godmother and Lloyd into the car for Lloydsboro Valley.

Then there were three more nights to go to sleep

in the white and gold room of the House Beautiful; three more days to wander up and down the long avenue under the locusts, arm in arm with the Little Colonel, or to go riding through the valley with her on Lad and Tarbaby; three more evenings to sit in the long drawing-room where the light fell softly from all the wax tapers in the silver candelabra, — and Lloyd, standing below the portrait of the white-gowned girl with the June rose in her hair, played the harp that had belonged to her beautiful grandmother Amanthis. Then it was time to start to New York, for Mr. Sherman's business called him there, and Betty was to go in his care.

It seemed to the Little Colonel that the week which followed, that last week of September, was the longest one she had ever known. Since the beginning of the house party she had not been without a companion. Now as she wandered aimlessly around from one old haunt to another, not knowing how to pass the time, it seemed she had forgotten how to amuse herself. She was waiting until the first of October to start to school.

At last Betty's steamer letter came, and she dashed home from the post-office as fast as Tarbaby could run, to share it with her mother. The letter was dated "On board the *Majestic*," and ran:

"DEAREST GODMOTHER AND LLOYD: — Everybody is in the cabin writing letters to send back by the pilot-boat, so here is a little note to tell you that we are starting off in fine style. The band is playing, the sun is shining, and the harbour is smooth as glass. I have been looking over the deck-railing, and the deep green water, rocking the little boats out in the harbour, makes me think of the White Seal's lullaby that godmother sang to us when we had the measles.

"'The storm shall not wake thee,
Nor shark overtake thee,
Asleep in the arms of the slow-swinging seas.'

"I know that I shall think of that many times during the passage, and am sure we are going to enjoy every minute of it. Eugenia sends lots of love to you both. She is writing to Joyce. The next time we write it will be from Southampton. If you could only be with us I should be perfectly happy. Good-bye, till you hear from me from the other side.

"Lovingly, BETTY."

There was a hasty postscript scribbled across the end. "Be sure you let me know the minute you hear anything from Dot. If anybody finds her, Cousin Carl says cable the word '*found*,' and we will know what you mean."

For a few minutes after the reading of the letter, the Little Colonel stood by the window, looking out without a word. Then she began:

"I wish I'd nevah had a house party. I wish I'd nevah known Joyce or Eugenia or Betty. I wish

I'd nevah laid eyes on any of them, or been to the Cuckoo's Nest, or — or *nothin' !*"

"What is the trouble now, Lloyd?" asked her mother, wonderingly.

"Then I wouldn't be so lonesome now that everything is ovah. I despise that 'left behind' feelin' moah than anything I know. It makes me so *misah'ble !* They've all gone away and left me now, and I'll nevah be as happy again as I've been this summah. I'm suah of it !"

"'Tis the last rose of summer left blooming alone.
All her lovely companions are faded and gone,'"

sang Mrs. Sherman, gaily, as she came and put an arm around Lloyd's drooping shoulders. "Every summer brings its own roses, little daughter. When the old friends go, look around for new ones, and you'll always find them."

"I don't want any new ones," exclaimed the Little Colonel, gloomily. "There'll nevah be anybody that I'll take the same interest in that I do in Betty and Joyce and Eugenia."

Yet even as she spoke, there were coming toward her life, nearer and nearer as the days went by, other friends, who were to have a large part in making its happiness, and who were to fill it with new interests and new pleasures.

CHAPTER X.

HOME-LESSONS AND JACK-O'-LANTERNS.

It was hard for the Little Colonel to start back to school after her long holiday. Hard, in the first place, because she was a month behind her classes, and had extra home-lessons to learn. Hard, in the second place, because a more gorgeous October had never been known in the Valley, and all out-doors called to her to come and play. In the lanes the sumach flamed crimson, and in the avenues the maples turned gold. In the woods, where the nuts were dropping all day long, the dogwood-trees hung out their coral berries, and every beech and sweet gum put on a glory of its own.

"Oh, mothah, I can't study," Lloyd declared one afternoon. "I don't care whethah the Amazon Rivah rises in South America or the South Pole; an' I think those old Mexicans were horrid to give their volcanoes an' things such terrible long names. They ought to have thought about the trouble they were makin' for all the poah children in the world

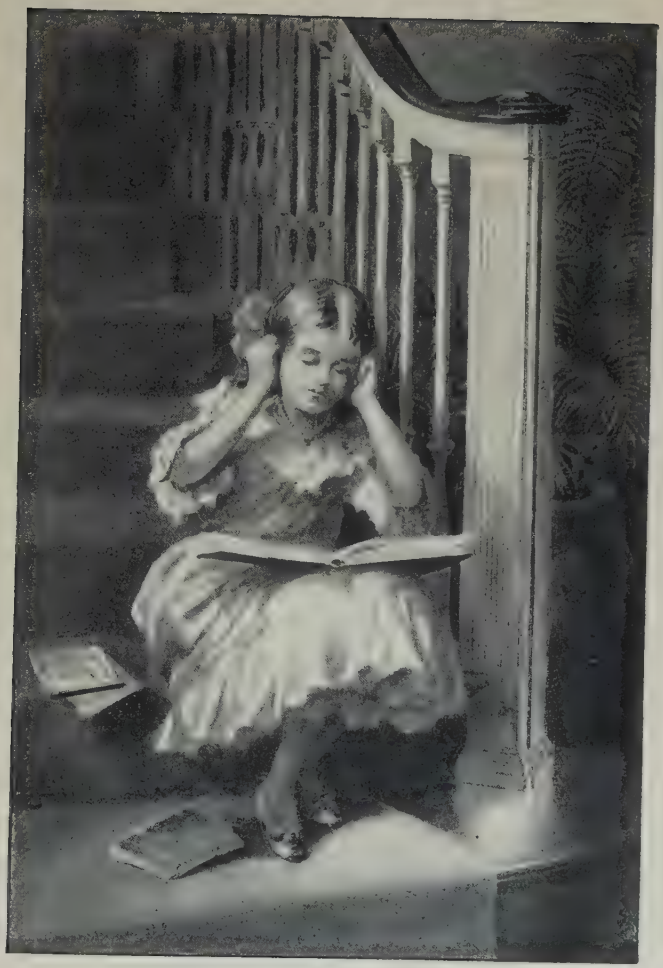
who would have to learn to spell them. I nevah can learn Popocatepetl. Why didn't they call it something easy, like — like Crosspatch!" she added, closing her book with a bang. "That's the way it makes me feel, anyhow. It is going to take all afternoon to get this one lesson."

"Not if you put your mind on it. Your lips have been saying it over and over, but your thoughts seem to be miles away."

"But everything interrupts me," complained Lloyd. "The bumble-bees an' the woodpeckahs an' the jay-birds are all a-callin'. I'm goin' in the house an' sit on the stair steps an' put my fingahs in my yeahs. Maybe I can study bettah that way."

The plan worked like a charm. In less than ten minutes she was back again, glibly reciting her geography lesson. After that all her home-lessons were learned on the stairs, where no out-door sights and sounds could arrest her attention.

She was in the midst of her lessons one afternoon, her book open on her knees, and her hands over her ears, when she felt, rather than heard, the jar of a heavy chair drawn across the porch. Dropping her hands from her ears, she heard her mother say: "Take this rocker, Allison. I'm so glad you have



"THE PLAN WORKED LIKE A CHARM."

come. I have been wishing that you would all afternoon."

"Oh, it is Miss Allison MacIntyre!" thought Lloyd. "I wish I didn't have to study while she is heah. I love to listen to her talk."

Thinking to get through as soon as possible, she turned her attention resolutely to her book, but, after a few moments, she could not resist stopping to lift her head and listen, just to find out what subject they were discussing. Although Miss Allison was her mother's friend, Lloyd claimed her as her own especial property. But all children did that. Such was the charming interest with which she entered into comradeship with every boy and girl in the Valley, that they counted her one of themselves. A party without Miss Allison was not to be thought of, and a picnic was sure to be a failure unless she was one of the number.

The two little knights, Keith and Malcolm, were privileged, by reason of family ties, to call her auntie, but there were many like Lloyd who put her on a pedestal in their affections, and claimed a kinship almost as dear. Presently Lloyd caught a word that made her prick up her ears, and she leaned forward, listening eagerly.

"Sister Mary's children are coming out next Sat-

urday. I was lying awake last night, wondering what I could do to entertain them, when it popped into my head that Saturday will be the last day of October, and of course they'll want to celebrate Hallowe'en."

"Sister Mary's children," repeated Lloyd to herself, with a puzzled expression, that suddenly turned to one of joyful recollection. "Oh, she means the little Waltons! I wondah how long they've been back in America?"

Her geography slipped unnoticed to the floor, as she sat thinking of her old playmates, whom she had not seen since their departure for the Philippines, and wondering if they had changed much in their long absence. There were four of them, Ranald (she remembered that he must be fourteen now, counting by his cousin Malcolm's age) and his three younger sisters, Allison, Kitty, and Elise. Some of the happiest days that Lloyd could remember had been the ones spent with them in the big tent pitched on the MacIntyre lawn; for no matter how far west was the army post at which their father happened to be stationed, they had been brought back every summer to visit their grandmother in the old Kentucky home.

Lloyd had not seen them since their father had been made a general, and they had gone away on

the transport to the strange new life in the Philippines. Although many interesting letters were sent back to the Valley, in which the whole neighbourhood was interested, it happened that Lloyd had never heard any of them read. Her old playmates seemed to have dropped completely out of her life, until one sad day when the country hung its flags at half-mast, and the black head-lines in every newspaper in the land announced the loss of a nation's hero.

Lloyd remembered how strange it seemed to read the account, and know it was Ranald's father who was meant. She thought of them often in the weeks that followed, for Papa Jack could not pick up a newspaper without reading some touching tribute to the brave general's memory, some beautiful eulogy on his heroic life, but somehow the strange experiences her little playmates were passing through seemed to set them apart from other children in Lloyd's imagination, and she thought of them as people in a book, instead of children she had romped with through many a long summer day.

As she listened to the voice on the porch she found that Miss Allison was talking about her sister, and telling some of the interesting things that had happened to the children in Manila. It was more

than the Little Colonel could endure, to sit in the house and hear only snatches of conversation.

"Oh, mothah, *please* let me come out and listen," she begged. "I'll study to-night instead, if you will. I'll learn two sets of lessons if you'll let me put it off just this once." There was a laughing consent given, and the next moment Lloyd was seated on a low stool at Miss Allison's feet, looking up into her face with an expectant smile, ready for every word that might fall from her lips.

"I was telling your mother about Ranald," began Miss Allison. "She asked me how it came about that such a little fellow was made captain in the army."

"Oh, was he a *really* captain?" cried Lloyd, in surprise. "I thought it was just a nickname like mine that they gave him, because his father was a general."

"No, he was really a captain, the youngest in the army of the United States Volunteers, for he received his appointment and his shoulder-straps a few weeks before his twelfth birthday. He'll never forget that Fourth of July if he lives to be a hundred; for those shoulder-straps meant more to him than all the noise and sky-rockets and powder-burns of all the boys in America put together. You see

he had been under fire at the battle of San Pedro Macati. He had gone out with his father, a short time after they landed in Manila, and the general in command invited them out on the firing line. Before they realised their peril, they suddenly found themselves under a sharp fire from the enemy. One of the staff said afterward that he had never seen greater coolness in the face of as great danger, and all the officers praised his self-possession. For a little while the bullets whizzed around him thick and fast. One hit the ground between his feet. Another grazed his hat, but all he said as one hummed by was, 'Oh, papa, did you see that? It looked like a hop-toad.'

"It was a terrible sight for a child's eyes, for he saw war in all its horrors, and his mother did not want him to take the risks of any more battle-fields, but he was a true soldier's son, and insisted on following his father wherever it was possible for him to go. At the battle of Zapote River he was in no danger, for he had been put in a church tower overlooking the field. But that was a terrible ordeal, for all day long he stood by the window, expecting any minute to see his father fall. All day long he looked for him, towering above his men, and whenever he lost sight of him for awhile, he

leaned out to watch the litters the men were carrying into the church below where they brought the dead and dying. It was always with the sickening dread that the still figure on some one of them might be that of his beloved father. Sister Mary sent me a copy of the official announcement, that gave him the rank of captain. It mentions his coolness under fire. You may imagine I am quite proud of that little document, for I always think of Ranald as he was when I had him with me most, a sensitive little fellow with golden curls and big brown eyes, as silent and reserved as his father. You see I know that his courage has no element of daring recklessness. So many things he did showed that, even when he was a baby. It is just quiet grit that takes him through the things that hardier boys might court. That, and his strong will.

"At first he was appointed aide-de-camp on his father's staff, and went with him on all his expeditions, and rode on a dear little Filipino pony. The natives called him the Pickaninny Captain. He was under fire again at the capture of Calamba, and soon after he was made an aide on Gen. Fred. Grant's staff. Once while under him he was ordered back in charge of some insurgents' guns that had fallen into the hands of the Americans, to be turned in at

headquarters. So you see he was a 'really' captain as you called him."

"Oh, tell some more, Miss Allison," begged Lloyd, thinking that the subject might be dropped, when Miss Allison paused for a moment.

"Well, I hardly know what else to tell. His room is full of relics and trophies he brought home with him, — shells and bullets and bolos — great savage knives with zigzag two-edged blades — flags, curios, — all sorts of things that he picked up or that the officers gave him. His mother can tell you volumes of interesting experiences he has had, but he is as shy and modest as ever about his own affairs, and maybe he'll never speak of them. He'll tell you possibly of the deer which the English consul gave him, and the pet monkey that followed him everywhere, even when it had to swim out through a rice swamp after him; maybe he'll mention the Filipino pony that the officers gave him when he came back to America, but he rarely speaks of those graver experiences, those scenes of battle and bloodshed."

"It doesn't seem possible that it is Ranald who has seen and done all those things," said the Little Colonel, thoughtfully. "When you play with people and fuss with them, and slap their faces when they pull your hair, or throw away their marbles when

they break your dolls, as we did, when we were little, it seems so queah to think of them bein' *heroes.*"

Miss Allison laughed heartily. "That's a universal trouble," she said. "We never can be heroes to our family and neighbours. Even brass buttons and shoulder-straps cannot outshine the memory of early hair-pullings."

"Tell about the girls," said Lloyd, fearing that if a pause were allowed in the conversation Miss Allison would begin talking about something less entertaining than her nephew and nieces. "Do they still love to play papah dolls and have tableaux in the barn?"

"Yes, I am sure they do. They didn't have as exciting a time as Ranald, for of course they stayed at home with their mother in the palace at Manila. But it was interesting. It had queer windows of little sliding squares of mother-of-pearl, that were shut only when it rained. They could peep through and see the coolies in their capes and skirts of cocoanut fibre, and the big hats, like inverted baskets, that made them look as if they had stepped out of Robinson Crusoe's story.

"On one side of the palace was the Pasig River, where the natives go by in their long skiffs. On the other side were the sights of the streets. Sometimes it was only an old peanut vendor whom they

watched, or a man with fruit or boiled eggs or shrimps or dulce. Sometimes it was the seller of parched corn, squatting beside the earthen pot of embers which he constantly fanned, as he turned the ears laid across it to roast. And sometimes the ambulances went by on their way to the hospital, reminding them that life on the island was not a happy play-day for every one. I am sure that the Lady of Shalott never saw more entertaining pictures in her magic mirror than the panorama that daily passed those windows of mother-of-pearl.

"Time never dragged there, you may be sure. Sometimes they were invited to spend an afternoon on the English war-ship, and the young officers gave them a spread and a romp over the ship. Allison still keeps an old hat with the ship's ribbon on it for a hat-band, which a gallant little midshipman gave her to remind her of the good times they had had together on the vessel. The English consul and vice-consul frequently invited them to tiffin or to parties, and their garden of monkeys was open to their little American neighbours at all times.

"Coming home the transport stopped in a Japanese harbour for a week. The faithful old Japanese servants, Fuzzi and her husband, who had lived with them in California and followed them to the Philip-

pines, were with them on the transport. This place where they stopped happened to be their native town, so they took the children on land every day and gave them a glimpse behind the scenes of Japanese life, which few foreigners see.

"Then Allison had a birthday, while they were homeward bound, away out in the middle of the Pacific, and the ship's cook surprised her by making her a magnificent birthday cake with her name on it in icing. Oh, they've had all sorts of unusual experiences, and many, no doubt, that I have never heard of, although they have been back in America a year. But now that they have taken a house in town I expect to have them with me a great deal. And that brings me to the matter I came up to see you both about. They are coming out Saturday, and I want you to help me give them a Hallowe'en party."

"Another holiday!" exclaimed Lloyd, clapping her hands. "I had forgotten that there was anything to celebrate between Fourth of July and Thanksgiving. I never went to a Hallowe'en party in my life, but it sounds as if it would be lots of fun."

"Do you remember the old house at Hartwell Hollow that has been vacant so long?" asked Miss

Allison. "The coloured people say it is haunted. Of course we do not believe such foolish things, or any of the foolishness of Hallowe'en in fact, but as long as we're going to resurrect the old superstitions, it is appropriate to have a haunted house for the purpose. The landlord says that it is that report which keeps it vacant. I saw him this morning, and got his permission to use it for the party. I think we can make an ideal spot of it. I'll have it swept and cleaned, and on Saturday afternoon I want you both to come and help me decorate it."

"Of course the only lights must be Jack-o'-lanterns," said Mrs. Sherman, entering into the plan as heartily as if she had been Lloyd's age. "The corn-field is full of pumpkins. Walker can make lanterns all day if necessary. It will take nearly a hundred, will it not, Allison?"

"I think so, although we will light only the downstairs rooms, but there ought to be some large ones on the porches. We'll try all the old charms that we tried when we were children; bake a fate cake, melt lead, bob for apples, and observe every silly old custom that we can think of. The house is unfurnished except for an old stove in the kitchen, but I can easily send over enough tables and chairs."

Miss Allison went away soon, after they had fin-

ished all their plans, and Lloyd stood looking after her as long as she was in sight.

"How can I wait until Saturday?" she asked, with a wriggle of impatience. "I'm so glad she asked us to help. Getting ready for things is nearly as much fun as the things themselves. But Hallowe'en pahties and home-lessons don't mix very well. I'll be thinking about that now, instead of my lessons. Oh, mothah, it seems to me I nevah can learn to spell that old volcano. I knew how last week, but I missed it again yestahday when we had review in spelling."

"I have thought of a way to mix Hallowe'en and home-lessons in such a way that you will never forget one word, at least," said her mother. "Tell Walker to bring the largest, roundest pumpkin that he can find in the field, and put it on the bench by the spring-house. Call me when he is ready."

Wondering what pumpkins and volcanoes had to do with each other, but charmed with the novelty of her mother's way of teaching spelling, Lloyd went skipping down the path to give the order to Walker. It was only a little while until she was back again.

"It is the biggest pumpkin I evah saw," she

reported. "It was too big fo' Walkah to carry. He had to bring it up on a wheelbarrow."

Taking a carving-knife as she passed through the kitchen, Mrs. Sherman caught up her dainty skirts and followed Lloyd down the path to the spring-house. It was late in the afternoon and a touch of frost was in the air. The yellow maple leaves were floating softly down from the branches above the path, and wherever the sun touched them on the ground lay a carpet of shining gold.

"See, mothah, isn't it a whoppah?" cried Lloyd, trying to put her arms around the mammoth pumpkin on the bench. "It is a beauty," answered Mrs. Sherman, as she began deftly outlining a face on one side of it, with the sharp carving-knife. First she drew two large circles in the yellow skin where the eyes were to be cut, a triangle for the nose, and a grinning crescent just below for the mouth.

"Now," she said, passing the knife to Lloyd, "carve the letters P-O in each circle. It does not matter if they are crooked. They are to be cut out with the circle afterwhile. Now in the triangle put the word CAT and the letter E after it, and in the crescent the word PET and the letter L. Now what does the face say to you?"

"The eyes say popo, the nose cat-e and the

mouth pet-l," answered Lloyd, laughing at the comical face outlined on the pumpkin.

"Shut your eyes and spell Popocatepetl," said Mrs. Sherman.

"Why, it is just as easy," cried Lloyd, as she rattled it off. "I can see each syllable grinning at me, one aftah the othah. I am suah I'll nevah fo'get it now. I like your way of teaching, bettah than anybody's."

Presently, as she scooped out the seeds while her mother made a mandarin hat of the slice she had cut off below the stem, she said, "Old Popocatepetl will make the biggest Jack-o'-lantern of them all. It's a good name for him, too, because he'll be all smoke and fiah inside aftah the candles are lighted. We can put him ovah the front doah. I wondah what Allison and Kitty and Elise will think of him. Oh, mothah, do you remembah the time that Kitty set all the clocks and watches in the house back a whole hour and made everybody late fo' church? And the time she folded a grasshoppah up in everybody's napkin, the night the ministah was invited to Mrs. MacIntyre's to dinnah, and what a mighty hoppin' there was as soon as the napkins were unfolded?"

Once started on Kitty's pranks, Lloyd went on

with a chapter of don't you remember this and don't you remember that, until the sun went down behind the western hills and old Popocatepetl grinned in ugly completeness even to the last tooth in his wide-spread jaw.

CHAPTER XI.

A HALLOWE'EN PARTY.

NOTHING worse than rats and spiders haunted the old house of Hartwell Hollow, but set far back from the road in a tangle of vines and cedars, it looked lonely and neglected enough to give rise to almost any report. The long unused road, winding among the rockeries from gate to house, was hidden by a rank growth of grass and mullein. From one of the trees beside it an aged grape-vine swung down its long snaky limbs, as if a bunch of giant serpents had been caught up in a writhing mass and left to dangle from tree-top to earth. Cobwebs veiled the windows, and dead leaves had drifted across the porches until they lay knee-keep in some of the corners.

As Miss Allison paused in front of the doorstep with the keys, a snake glided across her path and disappeared in one of the tangled rockeries. Both the coloured women who were with her jumped back, and one screamed.

"It won't hurt you, Sylvia," said Miss Allison.

laughingly. "An old poet who owned this place when I was a child made pets of all the snakes, and even brought some up from the woods as he did the wild flowers. That is a perfectly harmless kind."

"Maybe so, honey," said old Sylvia, with a wag of her turbaned head, "but I 'spise 'em all, I sho'ly do. It's a bad sign to meet up wid one right on de do'step. If it wasn't fo' you, Miss Allison, I wouldn't put foot in such a house. An' I tell you p'intedly, what I says is gospel truth, if I ketch sound of a han't, so much as even a rustlin' on de flo', ole Sylvia gwine out'n a windah fo' you kin say *scat!* Don't ketch dis ole niggah foolin' roun' long whar ghos'es is. Pete's got to go in first an' open de house."

But not even the rats interrupted Sylvia in her sweeping and garnishing, and by four o'clock all the rooms which were to be used were as clean as three of Mrs. MacIntyre's best trained servants could make them.

"Even ole Miss would call that clean," said Sylvia, looking around on the white floors and shining window-panes with a satisfied air.

Mrs. Sherman had driven down some time before, with a carriage-load of Jack-o'-lanterns, and was now arranging them in rows on all the old-fashioned black mantels. She looked around as Sylvia spoke.

"It would have been spookier to have left the dust and cobwebs," she said, "but this is certainly nicer and more cheerful."

Fires were blazing on every hearth, in parlour, dining-room, and hall, to dissipate the dampness of the long unused rooms. A kettle was singing on the kitchen stove, and tables and chairs had been brought over and arranged in the empty rooms. All that the woods could contribute in the way of crimson berries, trailing vines, and late autumn leaves, had been brought in to brighten the bare walls and festoon the uncurtained windows. The chestnuts, the apples, the tubs of water, the lead, and everything else necessary for the working of the charms was in readiness; the refreshments were in the pantry, and on the kitchen table Lloyd was arranging the ingredients for the fate cake.

"There couldn't be a bettah place for a Hallowe'en pahty," she said, looking around the rooms when all was done. "No mattah how much we romp and play, there's nothing that can be hurt. Won't it look shivery when all the Jack-o'-lanterns are lighted? Just as if some old ogah of a Bluebeard lived heah, who kept the heads of all his wives and neighbours sittin' around on all the mantels an' shelves."

It was in the ruddy glow of the last bright Octo-

ber sunset that they drove away from the house to go home to dinner. Even then the grounds looked desolate and forlorn; but it was doubly gruesome when they came back at night. The Little Colonel and her mother were first to arrive. They had offered to come early and light the lanterns, as Miss Allison was expecting all her nieces and nephews on the seven o'clock train, and wanted to go down to meet them.

The wind was blowing in fitful gusts, rustling the dead leaves and swaying the snaky branches of the grape-vine until they seemed startlingly alive. Now and then the moon looked out like a pale bleared eye.

"It is a real Tam O'Shanter night," said Miss Allison, as she led the way up the winding walk to the front door. "I can easily imagine witches flying over my head. Can't you?" she asked, turning to the little group surrounding her. There were eight children. For not only Ranald and his sisters had come with Malcolm and Keith, but Rob Moore and his cousin Anna had been invited to come out from town to try their fortunes at Hartwell Hollow, and spend the night in the Valley where they always passed their happy summers.

"Oh, auntie! What's that?" cried little Elise,

holding tightly to Miss Allison's hand, as she caught sight of Lloyd's old Popocatepetl, grinning a welcome by the front door. He looked like a mammoth dragon, spouting fire from nose, eyes and mouth.

Elise clung a little closer to Miss Allison's side as they drew nearer. "What awful teeth it's got, hasn't it?"

"Nothing but grains of corn, dear. Lloyd stuck them in. You haven't forgotten the Little Colonel, have you? She is inside the house now, waiting to see you." Then Miss Allison turned to the others. "Step high, children, every one of you, when you come to this broomstick lying across the door-sill. Be sure to step over it, or some witch might slip in with you. It is the only way to keep them out on Hallowe'en. Step high, Elise! Here we go!"

"That's one of the nice things about auntie," Kitty confided to Anna Moore as they followed. "She acts as if she really believes those old charms, and that makes them seem so real that we enjoy them so much more."

The Little Colonel, waiting in the hall for the guests to arrive, had been feeling a little shy about renewing her acquaintance with Ranald and his sisters. It seemed to her that they must have seen so much and learned so much in their trip

around the world, that they would not care to talk about ordinary matters. But when they all came tumbling in over the broomstick, they seemed to tumble at the same time from the pedestals where her imagination had placed them, back into the old familiar footing just where they had been before they went away.

Lloyd had thought about Ranald many times since Miss Allison's account of him had made him a hero in her eyes. She could not think of him in any way but as dressed in a uniform, riding along under fluttering flags to the sound of martial music. So when Miss Allison called, "Here is the captain, Little Colonel," her face flushed as if she were about to meet some distinguished stranger. But it was the same quiet Ranald who greeted her, much taller than when he went away, but dressed just like the other boys, and not even bronzed by his long marches under the tropical sun. The year that had passed since his return had blotted out all trace of his soldier life in his appearance, except, perhaps, the military erectness with which he held himself.

Kitty, after catching Lloyd by the shoulders for an impulsive hug and kiss, started at once to examine the haunted house.

"There'll be mischief brewing in a little bit, I'll promise you," said Miss Allison, as Kitty's head with its short black hair dodged past her, and there was a flash of a red dress up the stairway. "She is looking for the 'ghos'es' that Sylvia told her were up there."

Elise clung to Allison's hand, for the little sister wanted the protection of the big one, in those ghostly-looking rooms, lighted only by the fires and the yellow gleam of those rows of weird, uncanny Jack-o'-lantern faces. Like Kitty, both Allison and Elise had big dark eyes that might have been the pride of a Spanish señorita, they were so large and lustrous. Kitty's curls had been cut, but theirs hung thick and long on their shoulders. The sight of them moved Rob to a compliment.

"You and Anna Moore make me think of night and morning," he said, looking from Anna's golden hair to Allison's dusky curls. "One is so light and one is so black. You ought to go around together all the time. You look fine together."

"Rob is growing up," laughed Anne. "Two years ago he wouldn't have thought about making pretty speeches about our hair; he'd just have pulled it."

"Here comes a whole crowd of people," exclaimed

Allison, as the door opened again. "I wonder how many of the girls I'll know. Oh, there's Corinne and Katie and Margery and Julia Forrest. Why, nobody seems to have changed a bit. Come on, Lloyd, let's go and speak to them."

"I'm glad that everybody is coming early," said Lloyd, "so that we can begin the fate cake."

That was the first performance. When the guests had all arrived, they were taken into the kitchen. Under the ban of silence (for the speaking of a word would have broken the charm) they stood around the table, giggling as the cake was concocted, out of a cup of salt, a cup of flour, and enough water to make a thick batter. A ring, a thimble, a dime, and a button were dropped into it, and each guest gave the mixture a solemn stir before the pan was put into the oven, and left in charge of old Mom Beck.

By that time the two tubs of water had been carried into the hall. Several dozen apples were set afloat in them, with a folded strip of paper pinned to each bearing a hidden name. By the time these had been lifted out by their stems in the teeth of the laughing contestants, the lead was melted ready to use.

They tried their fate with that next, pouring a little out into a plate of water, to see into what

shapes the drops would instantly harden. Strangely enough, Ranald's took the shape of a sword. Malcolm's was a lion and Keith's a ship, the Little Colonel's a star and Rob's a spur. Some could have been called almost anything, like the one little Elise found in her plate. She could not decide whether to call it a sugar-bowl or a chicken. But Miss Allison explained them all, giving some funny meaning to each, and setting them all to laughing with the queer fortunes she declared these lead drops predicted.

They tried all the old customs they had ever heard of. They popped chestnuts on a shovel, they counted apple-seeds, they threw the parings over their heads to see what initials they would form in falling. They blindfolded each other and groped across the room to the table, on which stood three saucers, one filled with ashes, one with water, and one standing empty, to see whether life, death, or single blessedness awaited them in the coming year.

In the midst of these games Kitty beckoned the boys aside and led them out on the porch. "What do you think?" she whispered. "After all the trouble auntie has taken to plan different entertainments, Cora Ferris isn't satisfied. I heard her talking to some of the older girls. She told Eliza Hughes that she expected some excitement when she came, and

that she was dying to go down cellar backward with a looking-glass in one hand and a candle in the other. You know if you do that, the person whom you're to marry will come and look over your shoulder, and you can see him in the glass.

"The girls begged her not to, and told her that she'd be frightened to death if she saw anybody, but she whispered to Eliza that she knew she wouldn't be scared, for she was sure Walter Cummins was her fate, and would have to be down in the cellar if she tried the charm, and that she wouldn't be afraid of going into a lion's den if she thought Walter would be there. And Eliza giggled and threatened to tell, and Cora got red and put her hand over Eliza's mouth, and carried on awfully silly. It made me tired. But she's bound to go down cellar after awhile, and somebody has told Walter what she said, and he's going, just for fun. Now I think it would be lots of fun to watch Walter, and keep him from going, on some excuse or another, and then one of you boys look over her shoulder."

"Rob, you're the biggest, and almost as tall as Walter. You ought to be the one to go," suggested Keith.

"Down in that spook cellar?" demanded Rob. "Not much, Keithie, my son. I might see some-

thing myself, without the help of a looking-glass or candle. I am not afraid of flesh and blood, but I vow I'm not ready to have my hair turn white in a single night. I have been brought up on stories of the haunts that live in that cellar. My old black mammy used to live here, and she has made me feel as if my blood had turned to ice-water, lots of times, with her tales."

"You go, captain," said Malcolm, turning to Ranald. "You've been under fire, and oughtn't to be afraid of anything. You've got a reputation to keep up, and here is a chance for you to show the stuff you are made of."

"I am not afraid of the cellar," said the little captain, stoutly, "but I'm not going to be the one to look over her shoulder into the looking-glass. I don't want to run any risk of marrying that fat Cora Ferris."

A shout of laughter went up at his answer.

"You won't have to, goosey," said Rob. "There's nothing in those old signs."

"Well, I am not going to take any chances with her," he persisted, backing up against the wall. That settled it. They could have moved the rock foundation of the house itself easier than the captain, when he took that kind of a stand. Looking at it

from Ranald's point of view, none of the boys were willing to go down cellar, for they could easily imagine how the others would tease them afterward. Kitty's prank would have fallen through, if she had not been quicker than a weasel at planning mischief.

"What's to hinder fixing up a dummy man, and putting him down there?" she suggested. "You boys can run home and get Uncle Harry's rubber boots, and his old slouch hat, and some pillows, and that military cape that Ginger's father left there, and she'll think it is an army officer that's she's going to marry. Won't she be fooled?"

The boys were as quick to act as Kitty was to plan. A noisy game of blind man's buff was going on inside the house, so no one missed the conspirators, although they were gone for some time.

"We just ran home a minute for something," was Keith's excuse, when he and Malcolm and Ranald came in, red-faced and breathless. Rob and Kitty were still in the cellar, putting the finishing touches to the army officer. Kitty was recklessly fastening the dummy together with big safety-pins, regardless of the holes she was making in her Uncle Harry's high rubber hunting-boots.

"Isn't he a dandy!" exclaimed Rob, putting the slouched hat on the pillow head at a fierce angle,

and fastening the military cape up around the chin as far as possible. "Come on now, Kitty, let us make our escape before anybody comes."

Meanwhile, the boys had corralled Walter Cummins, and Cora, seeing him leave the room, thought that the proper time had come. Slipping the hand-mirror from the dressing-table in the room where they had left their wraps, she took a candle from one of the Jack-o'-lanterns on the side porch, and signalled the girls who had agreed to follow her. She was nearly sixteen, but the three girls who groped their way across the courtyard in the flickering light of her candle were much younger.

The cellar was entered from the courtyard, by an old-fashioned door, the kind best adapted to sliding, and it took the united strength of all the girls to lift it. A rush of cold, damp air greeted them, and an earthy smell that would have checked the enthusiasm of any girl less sentimental than Cora.

"I am frightened to death, girls," she confessed at the last moment, her teeth chattering. Yet she was not so frightened as she would have been had she not been sure that Walter had gone down the steps ahead of her.

"Hold the door open," she said, preparing to back slowly down. Her fluffy light hair stood out

"SHE BEGAN THE OLD RHYME."

like an aureole in the yellow candle-light, and the face reflected in the hand-mirror was pretty enough to answer every requirement of the old spell, despite the silly simper on her lips. When she was nearly at the bottom of the cellar steps she began the old rhyme:

> "If in this glass his face I see,
> Then my true love will marry me."

But the couplet ended in a scream, so terrifying, so ear-splitting, so blood-curdling, that Katie dropped in a cold, trembling little heap on the ground, and Eliza Hughes sank down on top of Katie, weak and shivering. Cora had seen the pillow-man in the cellar. Dropping the looking-glass with a crash, but clinging desperately to the candle, she dashed up the steps shrieking at every breath. Just at the top she stepped on the front of her skirt, and fell sprawling forward. She dropped the candle then, but not before it had touched her hair and set it afire.

The soft fluffy bangs blazed up like tow, and too terrified to move, Eliza Hughes still sat on top of Katie, screaming louder than Cora had done. The sight brought Katie to her senses, however, and scrambling up from under Eliza, she flew at Cora and began beating out the fire with her bare hands. Cora, who had not discovered that her hair was

ablaze, did not know what to make of such strange treatment. Her first thought was that Katie had gone crazy with fright, and that was why she had flown at her and begun to beat her on the head. It was all over in an instant, and the fire put out so quickly that only Cora's bangs were scorched, and Katie's fingers but slightly burned.

But the screams had reached through the uproar of blind man's buff, and the whole party poured out into the courtyard to see what had happened. There was great excitement for a little while, and Kitty, enjoying the confusion she had stirred up, giggled as she listened to Cora's startling description of the man that had peeped over her shoulder. "He didn't look like any one I'd ever seen before," she declared. "He was tall and handsome and dressed like a soldier."

"Oh, surely not, Cora," answered Miss Allison, who saw that some of the little girls gathered around her were badly frightened. "That couldn't be, you know. The cellar is quite empty. Give me the candle, and I'll go down and show you."

"Oh, no, please, auntie, don't go down," cried Kitty, seeing that the time had come to confess. "It is just a Hallowe'en joke. We didn't suppose that Cora would be scared. We just wanted to

tease her because she seemed so sure that she would find Walter down there. Go and bring him up, boys."

Ranald and Rob started down the stairs, with Keith carrying a candle, and Malcolm calling for Walter to come on and help carry out his rival. The four boys, picking up the dummy as if it had been a real man, carried it up the steps and laid it carefully on the ground. So comical did it look with its pudgy pillow face, that everybody laughed except Cora. She was furiously angry, and not all Kitty's penitent speeches or the boys' polite apologies could appease her. If it had not been for Miss Allison she would have flounced home in high displeasure. But she as usual poured oil on the troubled waters, and talked in such a tactful way of her harum-scarum niece's many pranks, that there was no resisting such an appeal. She allowed herself to be led back to the house, but she would not join in any of the games.

"Mom Beck says I'll have bad luck for seven years because I broke that looking-glass," she said, mournfully.

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Allison. "Don't give it another thought, dear, it is only an old negro superstition."

She might have added that it was to herself and brother the ill luck had come, since it was her silver mirror that was broken, and Harry's rubber boots that would be henceforth useless for wading because of the holes thoughtless Kitty had made in them with safety-pins, when she fastened them to the pillows.

Refreshments were served soon after they went back to the house. Not the cakes and ices that usually attended parties in the Valley, but things suggestive of Hallowe'en. Pop-corn, nuts, and apples, doughnuts and molasses candy. Then the fate cake was cut, and everybody took a slice to carry home to dream on.

"Eat it the last thing before you retire," said Miss Allison. "Then walk to bed backwards without taking a drink of water or speaking another word to-night. It is so salty that it is likely you will dream of being thirsty, and of somebody bringing you water. They say if you dream of its being brought in a golden goblet you will marry into wealth. If in a tin cup poverty will be your lot. The kind of vessel you see in your dream will decide your fate. Ah, Walter got the button in his slice. That means he will be an old bachelor and sew his own buttons on all his life."

Anna Moore got the dime, and Eliza Hughes the ring, which foretold that she would be the first one in the company to have a wedding. The thimble fell to no one, as it slipped out between two slices in the cutting. "That means none of us will be old maids," said little Elise. Miss Allison slipped it on Kitty's finger. "To mend your mischievous ways with," she said, and everybody who had enjoyed the pillow-man laughed.

The moon was hiding behind a cloud when at last the merry party said good-night, so Miss Allison provided each little group with a Jack-o'-lantern to light them on their homeward way. As the grotesque yellow heads with their grinning fire-faces went bobbing down the lonely road, it was well for Tam O'Shanter that he need not pass that way. All the witches of Allway Kirk could not have made such a weird procession. Well, too, for old Ichabod Crane that he need not ride that night through the shadowy Valley. One pumpkin, in the hands of the headless rider, had been enough to banish him from Sleepy Hollow for ever. What would have happened no one can tell, could he have met the long procession of bodiless heads that straggled through the gate that Hallowe'en, from the haunted house of Hartwell Hollow.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HOME OF A HERO.

With November came heavier frosts and the first light snowfall of the season, a skim of ice on the meadow-ponds, shorter days, and long cheerful evenings around the library fire. More than that, it brought the end of the extra home-lessons, for by this time the Little Colonel had not only caught up with her classes, but stood at the head of most of them.

"I think she deserves a reward of merit," said Papa Jack when she came home one day, proudly bearing a record of perfect recitations for a week. And so it came about that the next Friday afternoon she had a reward of her own choosing. Allison, Kitty, and Elise were invited out to stay until Monday. So for two happy days four little girls raced back and forth under the bare branches of the locusts, where usually one lonely child walked to and fro by herself. And because the daylight did not last half long enough, and because bedtime

seemed to come hours too soon, they were invited to come out next week also.

"It is almost like having Betty back again to have Allison," Lloyd confided to her mother. "She is so sensible, and has the same sweet little ways that Betty had of thinking of other people's pleasure first. Sometimes I forget and call her Betty. I wish they could all come out again next week."

"Have you looked at the calendar to see what comes next week, Lloyd?"

"No, mothah. What is it? Anybody's birthday?"

"What do we always have the last Thursday in November?"

"Oh, Thanksgiving!" exclaimed Lloyd, joyfully. "Anothah holiday! How fast they come!"

Usually Thanksgiving was made a great occasion at Locust, and the house was full of guests; but this year Mr. Sherman was obliged to be in New York all week, and the old Colonel was in Virginia. Lloyd and her mother were planning to celebrate alone when Aunt Jane sent for them to spend the Thanksgiving vacation with her in town.

Lloyd never enjoyed her visits to her great-aunt Jane. The house was too big and solemn with its dark furniture and heavily curtained windows. The chairs were all so tall that they lifted her feet high

above the floor. The books in the library were all heavy volumes with dull, hard names that she could not pronounce. The tedious hours when she sat in the invalid's dimly lighted room and listened to the details of her many ailments, or to tales of people whom she had never seen, seemed endless.

This Thanksgiving Day it was unusually cheerless. "All so grown-up and grumbly!" thought Lloyd. "Seems to me the lesson set for me to learn on every holiday is patience. I'm tiahed of being patient."

Aunt Jane had her Thanksgiving dinner in the middle of the day. Much turkey and plum-pudding made Lloyd drowsy, and the hour that followed was a stupid one. She sat motionless in a big velvet armchair listening to more of Aunt Jane's long stories of unknown people. Now and then she stifled a yawn, wishing with all her heart that she could change places with the little newsboy, calling papers in the street below the window, or with the stumpy-tailed dog frisking by in the snow. She fairly ached with sitting still so long, and wondered how her mother could be so interested in all that Aunt Jane was telling. She could have clapped her hands for joy when the maid broke the tediousness of the hour by asking Mrs. Sherman to step

out into the hall. Mrs. Walton wanted to speak to her at the telephone.

Lloyd slipped from her chair and followed her mother out of the room, thankful for any excuse to make her escape. She wished she could hear what Mrs. Walton was saying, instead of only one side of the conversation. This is what she heard her mother say:

"Is that you, Mary?"

"Yes; we came in for the Thanksgiving holidays, and expect to stay until Saturday afternoon."

"A Butterfly Carnival? How lovely!"

"No, I couldn't possibly leave for any length of time, thank you. Aunt Jane is counting on my staying with her; but I'll gladly accept for Lloyd if she is willing to stay away all night without me. Wait a moment, please, I'll ask her."

"Lloyd," she said, turning from the instrument, "Mrs. Walton has just telephoned me that you are included in the invitation that Anna Moore has given the girls to the Butterfly Carnival at the Opera House to-morrow afternoon. It is for the benefit of the free kindergarten in which Mrs. Moore is interested, and she has taken a box at the matinée for Anna and her friends. Anna is going to give a butterfly luncheon just before the performance. She

heard that you were in town and thought that you were visiting Allison, so she called at Mrs. Walton's to invite you. Mrs. Walton has asked you to stay all night with the girls. Would you like to go?"

Mrs. Sherman could not help laughing at the expression of delight on Lloyd's face as she began noiselessly clapping her hands.

"Oh, if it wouldn't be rude to Aunt Jane," she exclaimed, in a whisper, "I'd just *squeal*, I'm so glad to get out of this dismal place. It is all so grown-up and grumbly heah, and a Buttahfly Cahnival has such a delicious sound."

Mrs. Sherman turned to the receiver again, and Lloyd listened eagerly to one side of a short conversation about what to wear and when to go. Then Mrs. Sherman hung up the receiver, saying, "Allison and Kitty are coming for you. They will start on the next car. I'll ask Aunt Jane to send the man over with your clothes in a little while, and I'll call in the morning."

Twenty minutes later two bright faces smiled up at the window, two little muffs waved an excited greeting, and Kitty and Allison ran up the front steps to meet the Little Colonel.

"We're going to have the best time that ever was," cried Kitty. "Malcolm and Keith and Rob are

invited, too. So is Ranald, but he went out to grandmother's directly after dinner to-day. He said he wouldn't miss the good times he'd have in the country for forty old Butterfly Carnivals. But the lunch is going to be beautiful, and it will be so nice to go to the Carnival afterward, and all sit in the same box."

Mrs. Sherman, watching from an upper window, breathed a sigh of relief as she saw the three girls going gaily down the street together. She knew that Lloyd's vacation time could not fail to be a happy one if spent in the home of her old friend, Mary Walton.

"I feel so queah," said the Little Colonel, as she followed Kitty and Allison into the house and up the stairs to their rooms. "It is just as if some one had waved a wand, and said, 'Presto! change!' Only half an hour ago I was in a big dark house that was as quiet as a deaf and dumb person. But heah, it seems as if the very walls were talkin', and I can't take a step without seeing something curious. I am sure that there is a story about that Indian tomahawk and peace-pipe on the wall, and all those pretty things hanging ovah the doah."

"There is," answered Allison, pausing to point over the bannister to the curios arranged in the hall

below. "Papa brought them back from that Indian campaign, when he was out so long, and captured that dreadful old Apache chief, Geronimo. The things in that other corner are relics of the Cuban War, and the other things are from the Philippines."

Lloyd lingered a moment on the stairs, leaning over the bannister to peep into the library, where a flag, a portrait, and a sword shrined the memory of one of the nation's best belovèd. It was only a glimpse she caught, but with it came the impressive thought that she was in the home of a hero; and a queer feeling, that she could not understand, surged over her, warm and tender. It was as if she were in a church and ought to tread softly, and move reverently in such a presence.

"Come on," called Allison, throwing open the door into her room.

"How different this is from the Cuckoo's Nest," was Lloyd's next thought, as she looked about the interesting room, filled with toys and souvenirs from all parts of the world.

"I'd lots rathah look at these things than play," she said, when a choice of entertainment was offered her. "Oh, what a darling book!"

It was a quaint little volume of Japanese fairy tales she pounced upon, printed on queer, crinkly

paper, with pictures of amazing dragons and brilliant birds, such as only the Japanese artists can paint. But before she could examine that, Kitty had brought her a tortoise-shell jinrikisha, and Allison a toy Filipino bed. Elise marshalled out a whole colony of dolls, from Spanish soldiers to fur-clad Esquimaux babies. Each brought out her special treasures, and all talked at once. They piled the floor around her with interesting things, they filled her lap, they covered the chairs and tables. And for every article there was an interesting tale of the time or place where it had come into their possession.

Outside the snow began to fall again. The electric cars passed and repassed with whirr and rush and clang. The short winter day ended in sudden dusk, and the maid came in to light the gas.

"Why, how could it get dark so soon!" exclaimed Lloyd, looking up in surprise as she suddenly realised that it was night. "It doesn't seem to me that I have been heah any time at all. I have enjoyed it so much."

After the big Thanksgiving dinner nobody was very hungry, but they all followed Mrs. Walton down to the dining-room for a light lunch. Here Lloyd found herself in another treasure-house of interesting things. She could not turn her head without a

glimpse of something to arouse her curiosity, the quaint Chinese ladle on the sideboard, the gay procession of elephants and peacocks around the border of the table-cover, the old army chest, the silver candlesticks that had lighted the devotions of many a Spanish friar in the gray monasteries of Cuba, and the exquisite needlework of the nuns of far-away Luzon.

Mrs. Walton was the tale-teller now, and Lloyd listened with an intense eagerness that made her dark eyes grow more starlike than ever, and brought the delicate wild-rose pink flushing up into her cheeks.

Seeing what pleasure it was giving her little guest, Mrs. Walton took her into the library afterward and opened the cabinets, pointing out one object of interest after another. But the things that pleased Lloyd most were the bells in the hall. Near the foot of the stairs, in an oaken frame placed there for the purpose, swung three Spanish bells, that had been presented to Mrs. Walton as trophies of war. They had been taken from different church towers on the island of Luzon, by the Filipino insurgents, when they were sacking the villages and taking everything before them. These bells had been captured from the insurgents by the soldiers of the general's divi-

sion. A thrill went through the Little Colonel as Mrs. Walton told her their history, and swung one of the great iron tongues back and forth till the hall echoed with the clear ringing.

Several times during the evening Lloyd slipped out into the hall again to stand before these mute witnesses of the ravages of war, and tap the rims with light finger tips. She tapped so lightly that only the faintest echo sounded in the hall, but from her rapt face Mrs. Walton knew that the note awakened other voices in the Little Colonel's imagination. She had known Lloyd ever since she had gone to live at Locust, and she remembered the child's quaint habit of singing to herself.

All the words that pleased her fancy she strung together on the thread of a soft minor tune, in a crooning little melody of her own. "Oh, the buttercups an' daisies," she had heard her sing one time, standing waist-high in a field of nodding bloom. "Oh, the buttercups an' daisies, all white an' gold an' yellow. They're all a-smilin' at me! All a-sayin' howdy! howdy!"

And another time when the August lilies, standing white and waxen in the moonlight, had moved the old Colonel to speak tenderly of the wife of his youth, Mrs. Walton had seen a smile cross

his face, when the baby voice, unconscious of an audience, crooned softly from the door-step, "Oh, the locus'-trees a-blowin', an' the stars a-shinin' through them, an' the moonlight an' the lilies, an' Amanthis! An' Amanthis!"

Now, curious to know what thoughts the bells were awakening, Mrs. Walton bent her head to listen as the Little Colonel chanted to herself in a half-whisper, "Oh, the bells, the bells a-tolling, and the tales they ring for evah, of the battle-flags an' victory, an' their hero! An' their hero!"

The tears sprang to Mrs. Walton's eyes as she listened to the child's interpretation of the voices of the bells, and presently, when she looked up and saw Lloyd standing in front of the general's portrait, gazing reverently into the brave, calm face, she crossed the room and put an arm around her.

"Do you know," said the Little Colonel, in a confiding undertone, "when I look up at that, I know just how Betty feels when she writes poetry. She heahs voices inside, and thinks things too beautiful to find words for. There's something in his face, and about that sword that he used for his country, and the flag that he followed, and the bells that ring for his memory, that make me want to cry; and yet there's a glad, proud feelin' in my heart

because he was so brave, as if he sort of belonged to me, too. It makes me wish I could be a man, and go out and do something brave and grand. What do you suppose makes me feel both ways at the same time?"

"It is a part of patriotism," said Mrs. Walton, with a caressing hand on her hair.

"I didn't know I had any," said Lloyd, seriously, looking up with wondering eyes. "I always took grandfathah's side, you know, because the Yankees shot his arm off. I hated 'em for it, and I nevah would hurrah for the Union. I've despised Republicans and the Nawth from the time I could talk."

"Don't say that, Lloyd," said Mrs. Walton, still caressing her soft hair. "What have we to do with that old quarrel? Its time has long gone by. I, too, am a daughter of the South, Lloyd, but surely such lives as his have not been sacrificed in vain." She pointed impressively to the portrait. "That, if nothing else, would make me want to forget that North and South had ever been arrayed against each other. Surely such lives as his by their high loyalty should inspire a love of country deep enough to make America the guiding star of the nations."

Bedtime came long before Lloyd was ready for

it. "Do you want to tell your mother good night?" asked Mrs. Walton, stopping at the telephone as they passed through the upper hall.

"Oh, yes," cried Lloyd. "How different it is from the Cuckoo's Nest. You can't get homesick when you know you're at one end of a wiah, and yo' mothah is at the othah."

Mrs. Walton called up Aunt Jane's number, and, putting the receiver into Lloyd's hand, passed on into her room.

"Oh, mothah," Allison heard her say, "it's like livin' in that fairy tale, where everything in the picture was made alive. Don't you remembah? The birds sang, and the fishes swam, and the rivah ran. Everything in the picture acted as if it were alive and out of its frame. Everything in the house talks, for it has a story of its own. All the family have been tellin' me stories, and I've had a lovely Thanksgiving Day."

There was a long pause while Mrs. Sherman answered, then Allison heard Lloyd's voice again.

"The lesson is a beautiful one this time. It isn't patience any moah. It is *Patriotism.* Good night. Can you catch a kiss? Heah it is." Allison heard the noise of her lips, and then a laughing good night as she hung up the receiver.

They often had what they called night-gown parties at the Waltons, and they had one that night, when they were all ready for bed. The little group of white-robed figures gathered on the hearth rug at Mrs. Walton's feet, counting their causes for thankfulness, and chattering sociably of many things. Presently, across the merry conversation, fell a recollection that rested on Lloyd's mind like a shadow. She remembered Molly in her bare little bedroom over the kitchen, at the Cuckoo's Nest. Poor little Molly, who could never know a happy Thanksgiving so long as Dot was away from her!

Here was shelter and home-light and mother-love, but Molly had none of the latter to be thankful for. Lloyd could not drive away the thought, and when there came a pause in the conversation she began telling Molly's story to her interested listeners. It had the same effect on them that it had on Joyce and Eugenia, and presently Allison slipped down to the library to bring up a volume of bound magazines that the girls might see the picture that reminded Molly of Dot.

The grief of the poor little waif seemed very real to Elise, who hung over the picture, calling attention to every detail of the shabby room. "Look at the old broken stool," she said, "and her thin little

arms. And her shoes are all worn out, too. I wish she had a pair of mine."

Long after she was tucked away in her little white bed she called out through the darkness, "Mamma, do you s'pose Dot knows how to say her prayers?"

"I don't know, darling," came the answer. "It has been a long time since she had any one to teach her." There was a pause, then another whispered call.

"Mamma, do you s'pose it would do any good if I'd say them for her?"

"Yes, love, I am sure it would."

There was a rustling of bedclothes. Two bare feet struck the floor, and Elise knelt down in the dark, saying, softly:

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray thee, Lord, her soul to keep.
If she should die before I wake,
I pray thee, Lord, my soul to take.

Please, God, help poor little lost Dot to get back to her sister. Amen. There, I guess he'll know, even if it did sound sort of mixed up," she said, climbing back to bed with a sigh of mingled relief and satisfaction.

"That's the kind he loves best, little one," said her mother, coming into the room to tuck her in once more. "It doesn't make any difference about the pronouns. The more we mix our neighbours with ourselves in our prayers, the better he is pleased."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DAY AFTER THANKSGIVING.

"THERE! You are ready at last!" said Mrs. Sherman, as she finished buttoning Lloyd's gloves, and fastened the jewelled clasp of her long party cloak. She had come over to help the Little Colonel dress for the Butterfly Luncheon at Anna Moore's.

Feeling very elegant in her unusual party array, Lloyd surveyed herself in the mirror with a satisfied air, and sat down beside Allison to wait for the carriage that Mrs. Moore had promised to send for them. Mrs. Walton was tying Kitty's sash, and in the next room Elise was buzzing around like an excited little bee.

"Hold still! Do now!" they heard Milly say, impatiently. "I'll never get the tangles brushed out of your curls, and the others will go off and leave you, and you'll have to miss the party."

Presently there was a long protesting wail from Elise. "Oh, Milly, what did you put that ribbon on

my hair for? It isn't pink enough to match my stockings."

"There's scarcely any difference at all in the shades," answered Milly. "Sure it would take a microscope to tell, even if they were side by side, and your head is too far away from your heels for anybody to notice."

"Oh, but it won't do at all!" cried Elise, breaking away from her to run into the next room. "See, mamma, they don't match." In her eagerness Elise leaned over, bending herself like a little acrobat, till the pink bow on her hair was on a level with the pink silk stockings.

"There's barely a shade difference," laughed Mrs. Walton. "The difference is so slight that nobody will notice it unless you expect to double up occasionally like a jack-knife and call attention to it."

"Of course I don't expect to do that," said Elise, with such a funny little air of injured dignity that her mother caught her up with a hasty kiss. "You're a dear little peacock, even if you do think too much of your fine feathers. But you can't stop to make a fuss about your ribbons now. It would be making a mountain out of a mole-hill. Run back to Milly for your hat. I hear the carriage stopping out in front."

"What a lot of things I'll have to write about in my next letter to the girls," thought Lloyd, as they rolled along in the carriage a few minutes later. "Joyce and Betty will like to hear about the general's home and all the interesting things in it, and Eugenia will enjoy this part of my visit most."

It was with a view to impressing Eugenia with the elegance of her friends, that Lloyd noticed every detail of the beautiful luncheon. She intended that Eugenia should hear about it all. Gay butterflies, so lifelike that one could not believe that human hands had made them, were poised everywhere, on the flowers, the candle-shades, the curtains. The menu cards were decorated with them, the fine hand-painted china bore swarms of them around their dainty rims, and even the ices were moulded to represent them. The little hostess herself, fluttering around among her guests as gracefully as if she too were a winged creature, wore a gauzy dress of palest blue, embroidered in butterflies, and there were butterflies caught here and there in her golden curls.

The Little Colonel could scarcely eat for admiring her. She felt very elegant and grown up to be the guest at such an entertainment, and as she took her place at the table between Malcolm and Rob, she

THE BUTTERFLY CARNIVAL.

wished with all her heart that Eugenia could peep in and see her.

It was time to start to the Butterfly Carnival almost immediately when luncheon was over, and again Lloyd felt very elegant and grown up rolling along in the carriage to the matinee. Mrs. Moore ushered the party into the box she had taken for Anna and her little friends, and more than one person in the audience turned to ask his neighbour, "Who are those lovely children? Did you ever see such handsome boys? They have such charming manners. It is like a scene from some old court-play." The Little Colonel, sitting beside Anna, with the two little knights leaning forward to talk to her, to pick up her fan, or adjust her lorgnette, was all unconscious that any one in the audience was watching her admiringly, but she wished again that Eugenia could see her.

When the curtain went up the scene on the stage was so absorbing that she forgot Eugenia. She forgot where she was, for the play carried her bodily into fairy-land. The queen of the fairies was there with her star-tipped wand and all her spangled court, and Lloyd looked and listened with breathless attention, while the naughty Puck played pranks on all the butterflies, and, finally catching them at play in

a moonlighted forest, took all the gauzy-winged creatures captive. It was as entrancing as looking into a living fairy tale, and when at last the queen released the prisoners with a wave of her star-tipped wand, and to the soft notes of the violins, the butterflies danced off the stage, Lloyd drew a long breath and came down to earth with a sigh. She could have listened gladly for hours more.

But the curtain was down, the people were rising all over the house, and Keith was holding her party cloak for her to slip into. Mrs. Moore turned to Allison.

"Elise is wild to see behind the scenes," she said. "I am going to keep her with me a little while. Your cousin Malcolm says that he and Keith can take you home in their carriage with Lloyd and Kitty. So I'll send Anna and Rob home in mine and wait here until it comes back. Tell your mother I'll take good care of Elise and bring her home as soon as I attend to my little protegés behind the scene."

Many of the children who had taken part in the performance were from the free kindergarten, and Elise, holding fast to Mrs. Moore's hand, watched the transformation behind the scenes, from gauzy wings to gingham gowns, with wondering eyes.

"It is like when Cinderella lost her glass slipper," she said. "The clock struck twelve, and her silks turned to rags."

All the glitter and glory of fairy-land had disappeared with the footlights. In the wintry light of the late afternoon, some of the faces were pitifully thin and wan.

"Here are three little butterflies that must go back home and be grubs again," said Mrs. Moore, as she beckoned to the children whom she had promised to take home in her carriage. Elise looked at them, wondering if it could be possible that they were the same children, who, fifteen minutes before, had looked so radiantly beautiful in their spangled costumes on the stage. They were shy little things who could scarcely find words to answer Mrs. Moore's questions, but they seemed to enjoy the drive in the warm closed carriage, behind the team of prancing bays.

Elise chatted on gaily, telling Mrs. Moore how much she had enjoyed the carnival, how she had admired the fairy queen, and how she longed for a real live fairy. She had looked for them often in the morning-glories and the lily-bells. If she could find one maybe it would tell her where to look for Dot.

Presently they turned into a side street among

unfamiliar tenement-houses, and paused at an alley entrance.

"I am going to the top of the stairs with the children," said Mrs. Moore, preparing to step out of the carriage. "I want to inquire about the baby, who is sick. I'll be back in a moment, Elise."

As the carriage door closed behind her she spoke to the coachman. "Wait here a moment, Dickson." The man on the box touched his hat and then turned his fur collar higher around his ears. There was a cold wind whistling through the alley. Elise pressed her face against the glass and looked out into the wintry street. Mrs. Moore's moment stretched out into five. The baby up-stairs was worse, and she was making a list of the many things it needed for its comfort.

There was little of interest to watch from the carriage window. Few people were passing along the narrow pavement, and Elise wondered impatiently why Mrs. Moore did not come. Presently, down the street came a ragged child with its arm held up over its eyes, sobbing and sniffling as it shuffled along in a pair of wornout shoes many sizes too large for its little feet.

Elise's heart gave a great thump, and she started forward eagerly.

"Molly's little lost sister!" she exclaimed aloud. "It must be, for she looks just like the girl in the picture. Oh, I must call her!"

She was fumbling at the knob of the carriage door, but before she could get it open, the child turned and started up the dirty alley, still sobbing aloud, with her arm over her face.

"Oh, I must call her back," thought Elise. "Everybody will be so glad if she is found. I mustn't let her get away."

It took all her strength to turn the knob, but with another desperate wrench she got the door open, and climbed out to the pavement. The coachman, half asleep in his great fur collar and heavy lap-robes, did not hear the tap of the little pink boots, as she ran up the dark alley between the high, rickety buildings, with their bad smells and dirty sewers.

"Oh, she is going so fast!" panted Elise. "I'll never catch up with her!" The pretty pink boots were wet and snowy now, the silk stockings splashed with muddy water. Her big velvet hat was tipped over one eye and her curls were blowing in tangles over the wide collar of her fur-trimmed cloak. But forgetting all about her fine feathers, she ran on, around corners, into strange passages, across unfamiliar streets, following the flutter of a tattered

gown. All of a sudden she paused, looking around in bewilderment. The child she was following had disappeared.

With a bitter sense of disappointment swelling in her little heart, she turned to go back to the carriage, and then stood still in bewilderment. She could not tell which way she had come. She was lost herself! For a few minutes the little pink boots trudged bravely on, then the tears began to gather in her big black eyes.

"They'll feel so bad at home," she thought, "when they hunt and hunt and can't find me anywhere. Oh, what if I'd stay lost, and get to look all ragged and dirty like Dot, and just have to stand in a corner and cry. If there was any nice stores along here, I'd go in and ask the man to send me home, but these places look so dreadful I'm afraid."

She was in a disreputable part of the town, where second-hand clothing stores and pawn-shops were crowded in between saloons and cheap restaurants, and she dared not venture into any of them to ask for help. Little as she was, she felt that she was safer on the streets than inside those crowded, dirty quarters, where half-drunken negroes and coarse, brawling white men quarrelled and swore in loud tones.

"It's the saloons that brought all the trouble to Molly and Dot," thought Elise, shrinking away from a group of noisy loafers, as they straggled out of one. "They made their father mean and their mother die and their grandmother go crazy and them lose each other. They're worse than wild beasts, and I'm afraid of 'em. Maybe if I walk far enough I'll come to a nice policeman, but I'm so tired now." Her lip quivered as she whispered the words. "Oh, it seems as if I'd drop! And I'm so cold I am nearly frozen."

As she walked on, across her way an electric arch suddenly shot its cold white light into the street. Then another and another appeared, and as far as she could see in any direction the streets were brilliantly illuminated.

"Oh, it's night!" she sobbed. "I'll freeze to death before morning if somebody doesn't come and find me."

Still she dragged on, growing more tired and frightened at every step, until she could walk no longer. At the end of a long block she sat down on a doorstep, and huddled up in one corner out of the wind. A dismal picture came to her mind of the little match-seller in Hans Andersen's fairy tales. The little match-seller who had frozen to death on Christmas eve, on the threshold of somebody's happy home.

"She had a box of matches to warm herself with," sobbed Elise. "I haven't even that. Oh, it's awful to be lost!"

With the tears trickling down her face she pictured to herself the grief of the family in case they should never find her.

"Mamma will stand in the door and look out into the dark and call and call, but her little Elise will never answer. And Allison and Kitty will feel so bad that they won't want to play. They'll divide my things between them to remember me by, and for a long time it'll make them cry whenever they see my dolls and books, or my place at the table, or my little wicker chair in the library, that I'll never sit in any more. Ranald won't cry, 'cause he's a captain and he's brave. But he'll be just as sorry. Oh, I wish Ranald wasn't out in the country! He could find me if he was at home."

It was growing colder and colder on the doorstep. The child's teeth chattered and her lips were blue. Still she sat there, until an evil-looking man in the next house slouched out on to the street with a lean spotted dog at his heels. Suddenly, for no reason that Elise could discover, for she did not know that he was half drunk, he turned and kicked the poor beast, cursing it violently. It shrank away, yelping

with pain. Seeing that the man was coming toward her, Elise sprang up in terror, and with one frightened glance over her shoulder, darted around the corner. Once out of his sight, she stopped running, but fear kept her moving, and she walked wearily on and on. Every step carried her farther away from home.

Through unwashed windows she could see the yellow lamplight streaming over dingy rooms. Most of the sights were unattractive, but in one house, cleaner than the rest, she saw a crowd of clamouring children seated around a supper-table, all reaching their spoons and plates toward a big steaming platter in the middle. It reminded her that she was hungry herself, and she lingered a moment, looking wistfully in at the cheerful scene. Then on she started again. Once she stumbled and fell in the slush of a snowy crossing, but scrambled bravely up again, walking on and on.

Meanwhile Allison, Kitty, and the Little Colonel, who had gone ahead in the carriage with the boys, had stopped at Klein's for a box of candy, and at a book store for a dissected game they had been discussing at the luncheon. When they reached Mrs. Walton's, Malcolm sent the carriage home, and both the boys went into the house with the girls.

"Tell mamma we'll come up-stairs in a few minutes and tell her all about the carnival," said Allison to the maid who opened the door.

The five children went into the library with their candy and game, and Mrs. Walton, busy with many letters, did not notice how Allison's few minutes lengthened out, until it grew so dark that she had to lay down her pen. As she did so, a carriage drove rapidly up to the house, Mrs. Moore hurried up the steps, and there was a hasty dialogue at the door between her and Allison.

Mrs. Walton did not hear the frightened cry, "Oh, mamma! Elise is lost!" that went up from Allison. And impetuous Kitty, hearing no answer, and feeling that she must summon help in some way, began beating madly on the bells of Luzon, as if she were trying to call out the whole fire department.

As the clangour startled her, Mrs. Walton's first thought was that the house must be on fire, and she hurried out to the head of the stairs and looked over the bannister. Kitty was still beating on the bells with an umbrella that she had snatched from the rack.

"Stop, Kitty!" she called. "Tell me what is the matter?"

"Elise is lost!" repeated Allison, and Mrs. Walton, with a white face, hurried down to hear Mrs. Moore's explanation.

She had been detained some time in the tenement-house, listening to the tale of woe that the sick baby's mother poured out to her; but she had felt no uneasiness about Elise, knowing that the foot-stove in the carriage would keep her warm and comfortable. When she came down, to her utter amazement the carriage door stood open, and the child was gone.

The sleepy coachman, who roused himself from his cold doze when he heard her coming, was as surprised as she, and declared he had not heard the carriage door open or the child slip out. He had no idea what could have become of her. They made inquiries of people all along the block, but nobody had seen a child answering to the description of Elise. Then Mrs. Moore thought that the child must have grown tired of waiting, and for some reason had started to walk home. She had driven out to the house with the hope that she might find her there, or might overtake her on the way.

Mrs. Walton acted quickly. "Telephone to your father, Malcolm," she cried, "and to the police station. Oh, my poor baby, out in the cold streets with

night coming on. I must look for her without losing a minute."

She started up the stairs to call Milly help her dress for the search. "Get my furs," she called, "and my heaviest coat. It will be a cold night." But Malcolm stopped her.

"Don't go, Aunt Mary," he cried. "Papa is on his way here now, and we boys will go in your place. The policemen are being notified all over the city, and it will do more good for you to stay here ready to answer any questions that may come."

"I'll wait until Mr. MacIntyre comes," said Mrs. Moore, "so that I can take him straight back to that tenement district if he thinks best to go."

While they were still standing, an anxious little group in the hall, Mr. MacIntyre came in, and after a hurried consultation he and Mrs. Moore drove in one direction, and the boys started in another.

None of them like to remember the three hours that followed. The news spread like wild-fire, and the telephone bell rang constantly with friendly messages. Each time they hoped that some one of the searching party was calling them up, but each time they were disappointed. At intervals one of the girls stole to the front door to look out into the night and listen. Every voice made them start, every

footstep. Every roll of carriage wheels along the avenue made them hold their breath in suspense until it had passed.

Presently, Kitty, leaving her mother at the telephone, and Allison and Lloyd on the stairs, strolled down to the kitchen, where Milly and the cook were talking about Charlie Ross and all the children they had ever heard of who had mysteriously disappeared from home.

"An' it's just the loikes av her they'd be afther taking," said the cook, wiping her eyes. "She was that pretty wid her long currls, an' eyes shparklin' loike black dimonts, an' her swate little mouth wid its smile fit for a cherub. I moind the very last toime I saw her. Only this afthernoon she coom down here to show me her foine clothes she was wearin' to the parrty. There's no doubt in me moind but that somebody's stolen her on account av them same illigent clothes. Mebbe they think there'll be a big reward offered. Bless the two little pink shoes av her! It'll be a sorry day for this house if they niver coom walking into it again."

Kitty stole out of the kitchen cold with this new horror, and went back to whisper it to Allison and Lloyd, as they sat on the stairs ready to spring forward at the first sound of coming footsteps.

"Now if it had been Allison who was lost," thought Mrs. Walton, "she could have found her way home without any difficulty. She is such a sensible, womanly child, always to be trusted for doing the right thing in the right place. Kitty might not act so wisely, but she would bang ahead and come out all right in the end. She is the kind one might expect to see come home in almost any style, from a coal cart to a triumphal car. But my baby Elise is so little and so timid, my heart aches for her. She will be so sorely frightened."

Dinner was put on the table and carried out again. Nobody could eat, and as the moments dragged by the girls still sat on the stairs, and the anxious mother sprang to the telephone at every tinkle of the bell, praying for a hopeful message from the police-station.

Elise, stumbling on down strange streets, exhausted, hungry, and cold, stopped on a street corner and looked around her. She had strayed down among the warehouses now, and the little feet, numb with cold, were too tired to go much farther. Down here few people were passing. A big tobacco warehouse, looming up tall and dark above her, made her feel so tiny and lost, that the last bit of her courage ebbed away, and she began to sob aloud.

Out of the shadow just ahead a man was coming toward her. So tall and broad-shouldered he looked, that he seemed a giant to her terrified eyes. She put her little gloved hands over her eyes to shut out the sight, and crouched close against the wall, her baby heart fluttering like a frightened bird's.

On he came, with slow, heavy tread, his footsteps ringing through the silent street with a strange metallic echo. As he passed out from the black shadow of the warehouse, into the light of the street-crossing, Elise peeped between her fingers again, and then smiled through her tears. It was a big, burly policeman.

The next instant she was running toward him, calling, "Oh, Mister Policeman, I'm lost! *Please* take me home!"

It was a safe haven she had run into. The policeman had just come from home to go on his beat, and in a little cottage not many blocks away were three children who were still in his thoughts. They had followed him to the door to swarm over him and kiss him, and had called after him down the snowy street, "Good night, daddy!" The childish voices were still ringing in his ears.

As tenderly as if she had been one of his own, he lifted Elise in his strong, fatherly arms, wiped her

tear-stained face, and began to question her. She told him her name, but in her confusion could not remember the name of the street where she lived.

It was the work of only a moment to carry her into a drug-store around the corner, ring up headquarters, and report his discovery, and it was only a few moments after that until they were on an electric car, homeward bound.

Elise was not the first lost child the big, tender-hearted policeman had taken home, but he had never had such a royal welcome as the one that awaited him in the hall when the joyful family met him.

He glanced around him curiously, seeing on every side the relics of victorious battle-fields, the grim weapons of warfare that stood as mute witnesses of a brave soldier's life. Beyond in the library he caught a glimpse of the portrait, the flag, and the sword, and then suddenly realised in whose presence he stood.

"Don't mention it, madam," he said, awkwardly, as the grateful mother tried to express her thanks. "Don't you know that this is about the proudest moment of my life? To know that it was *his* little one I found, and brought back with her arms around my neck! I read everything there was about him in the papers (he nodded toward the portrait), and I always did say he was exactly my idea of a hero.

But I never thought the day would come when I'd stand in his house and see all the things he touched and looked at."

"That's the way everybody seems to feel about the general," thought the Little Colonel, glancing from the blue-coated policeman to the portrait. "It's grand to be a hero."

Elise was too tired and sleepy to talk about her adventures that night, and asked to be put to bed as soon as she had had the bowl of oyster soup that was being kept hot for her. When the cook brought it in, loudly blessing all the saints in the calendar that the child had been found, all the family remembered that they were hungry and the long delayed dinner was brought on again.

Elise fell asleep at the table before she finished the soup, but she opened her drowsy eyes as they were carrying her away to bed to say, "You all won't feel very bad, will you, if I give you just a teenty weenty Christmas present this year? 'Cause I want to save most of my money to buy something nice for that big policeman that brought me home. Being found is the very best thing in all the world, and I would have been lost yet, if it hadn't been for him."

CHAPTER XIV.

LLOYD MAKES A DISCOVERY.

"It *was* Molly's little lost sister, I'm sure of it!" insisted Elise next morning, stopping in the middle of her dressing to argue the matter with Lloyd and Allison. "Of course I couldn't see her face, for she had her apron up over it, crying. But neither can you see the little girl's face in the picture, Allison Walton, and the rest of her was exactly like the picture. See?"

She ran across the room for the magazine that had been brought up from the library on the night of Thanksgiving, and which still lay open on the table.

"They have the same thin little arms and ragged clothes and everything. Oh, I am sure it was Dot that I ran after, and now that I know how awful it is to be lost, I'd do anything to find her. I dreamed about her last night, and I can't think about anybody else."

So positive was she, that Lloyd could hardly wait

for ten o'clock to come, the hour that her mother had promised to call for her. They were to begin their Christmas shopping that morning, for the calendar showed them that whatever gifts they intended sending Betty and Eugenia must soon be started on their way, in order to reach them in time. Lloyd was so excited over the prospect of finding Dot that she wanted to postpone the shopping, and start at once for the tenement district where Elise had wandered away from her carriage.

"I know that Betty and Eugenia would rather do without any Christmas gifts," she declared almost tearfully, "than miss this chance of finding her. Betty used to talk about it all the time, and if we don't go this morning, something may happen that we may never find her."

"But be reasonable, dear," answered Mrs. Sherman. "It would be like hunting for a needle in a haystack. You have such a slight clue, Lloyd. That picture is *not* a picture of Molly's sister. It is only one that reminded Molly of her, and there are thousands of poor little waifs in the world that look like that. I will see the Humane Society about her, and the teachers of the free kindergarten who work in that district, and we will report the case to the police.

It would be useless for us to go wandering aimlessly around, up one flight of dirty stairs and down another."

Lloyd had to be content with that, but all the time she was going around among the shops, trying to choose gifts appropriate to send across the sea, she kept thinking of Molly as she had seen her that rainy day, lying face downward on her cot and sobbing out her misery in the little attic room of the Cuckoo's Nest.

They went back to Mrs. Walton's for lunch, where Elise was still talking of her adventure of the night before.

"I wish Dot had some of this good plum-pudding," she remarked. "She looked so cold and hungry. Maybe she was crying because she didn't have anything to eat."

Mrs. Walton shook her head in perplexity. "Everything leads straight back to that subject," she exclaimed. "The child has talked of nothing else all morning. Oh, I almost forgot to tell you, Lloyd. Mrs. Moore called while you were out this morning, and promised Elise she would take her through all those tenements next week. She is very charitable, and has helped so many poor people in that part of the city that they will do anything for her. She

thinks that there really may be some possibility of finding the child."

Lloyd's face shone as if she had come into the possession of a fortune. She was sure now that Dot would be found in time to keep Christmas with them, and she could scarcely wait until she reached home to write to Betty about the search that was to be made.

She went back to her Aunt Jane's that afternoon to wait until train time, much to the disappointment of Allison and Kitty, who were arranging some tableaux.

"You'll write to me if they find out anything about Dot, won't you?" she asked Allison at parting.

"Yes, the very next breath," answered Allison. So the Little Colonel went away quite hopeful, and for days she haunted the post-office. Before school, after school, at recess, sometimes the last thing before dark, she made a pilgrimage to the post-office, to stand on tiptoe and see if anything was in their box. But the days went by, and the long-looked-for letter never came. There were papers and magazines, thick letters from Joyce, and thin foreign-stamped ones from Betty and Eugenia, but none that told of a successful search for Dot.

Two weeks before Christmas there came a letter

from Allison, inviting her to spend the following Saturday in town. On the opposite page her mother had pencilled a postscript almost as long as the letter itself, saying: "Do come in with Lloyd. Sister Elise usually makes a merry Christmas for the little ones at the Children's Hospital, but this year she will be so busy with other things that she has asked us to take her place. Malcolm and Keith have asked for an unusually big celebration at Fairchance this Christmas, and she will have her hands full trying to carry out all their plans.

"I have promised to take her place here, and we have planned a tiny individual Christmas tree for each child in the hospital. I am going to take the girls down there Saturday and let them talk to the children, and find out, as far as possible, what gift would make each one happy. Be sure to come in with Lloyd. Even if we have failed in our efforts to find little Dot, we may have a hand in making twenty other little souls supremely happy on Christmas Day. Come on the early train, and we will go to the hospital first, and spend the rest of the day in shopping."

Luckily it was late in the week when the letter arrived, or Lloyd would have had a hard time waiting for Saturday. So impatient was she for the holiday

to come that she began to count the hours and then even the minutes.

"Two whole days and nights!" she exclaimed. "That makes forty-eight hours, and there's sixty minutes in an hour, and sixty seconds in a minute. That makes — let me see." It was too big a sum to do in her head, so she ran for pencil and paper and began multiplying carefully, putting down the amount in neat little figures.

"One hundred and seventy-two thousand eight hundred seconds," she announced, finally. "What a terrible lot. The clock has to tick that many times before I can go."

"But remember, part of that time you will be asleep," suggested Papa Jack. "Over fifty thousand of these seconds will be ticked off when you know nothing about it."

That was some comfort, and the Little Colonel, putting on her warmest winter wrappings, went out to make some of the other seconds go by unnoticed, by rolling up snowballs for a huge snow-man on the lawn.

It had been a dull week in the hospital. Gray skies and falling snow is a dreary outlook for children who can do nothing but lie in their narrow beds and look wearily out of the windows. This Saturday

morning the nurses had given the little invalids their baths and breakfasts, the doctors had made their rounds, and in each ward were restless little bodies who longed to be amused.

Those who were well enough to be propped up in bed fingered the games and pictures that had entertained them before; but a dozen pairs of eyes in search of some new interest turned expectantly toward the door every time it opened. Suddenly a stir went through the ward where the convalescents lay, and the wintry morning seemed to blossom into June-time.

Four little girls, each with her arms full of great red roses, with leafy stems so long that it seemed the whole bush must have been cut down with them, passed down the room, leaving one at each pillow.

"My Aunt Elise sent them," said the smallest child, pausing at the first white bed. "She asked us to bring them 'cause she couldn't come herself. They're American Beauties and they always make me think of my Aunt Elise."

"She must be a dandy, then," was the response of Micky O'Brady, on whom she bestowed one, taking it up awkwardly in his left hand. His right one was still in a sling, and one leg had just been taken out of a plaster cast, for he had been run over by a heavy

truck, and narrowly escaped being made a cripple for life. Elise stopped to question him about his accident, and found that despite his crippled leg a pair of skates was what he wished for above all things. While she was chattering away to him like a little magpie, Kitty and Allison went on down the room with their roses. It was not the first time they had been there, and they knew some of the children by name. But it was all new to Lloyd. In the next room the sight of the white little faces, some of them drawn with pain, almost brought the tears to her eyes.

There were only six beds in this ward, and at the last one Lloyd laid a rose down very softly, because in that bed the little invalid lay on one side as if she were asleep. But as the perfume of the great American Beauty reached her, she opened her eyes and smiled weakly. Lloyd was so startled that she dropped the rest of the roses to the floor and clasped both hands around the bedpost. For the eyes that smiled up at her, keen and gray with their curly black lashes, might have been Molly's own, they were so like hers. The black hair brushed back from the white face waved over the left temple exactly as Molly's did. There were the same straight black eyebrows and the familiar droop of the pretty little

mouth, and it seemed to Lloyd, as she stared at her with a fascinated gaze, that it was Molly herself who lay there white and wan. Only a much smaller Molly, with a sad, hopeless little face, as if the battle with life had proved too hard, and she was slowly giving it up.

The child, still smiling, weakly raised her bony little hand to lift the rose from the pillow, and even the gesture with which she laid it against her cheek was familiar.

"Oh, *what* is your name?" cried Lloyd, forgetting that she had been told not to talk in that room.

"The people I lived with last called me Muggins," said the child, faintly, "but a long time ago it used to be Dot."

As she spoke she turned her head so that both sides of her face were visible, and Lloyd saw that across the right eyebrow was a thin white scar.

"Oh, I knew it!" cried Lloyd, under her breath. "I knew it the minute I looked at you!" Then to the child's astonishment, without waiting to pick up the fallen roses, she ran breathlessly into the hall.

"Mothah! Mrs. Walton!" she cried, breaking into their conversation with one of the nurses. "Come quick, I've found her! It's really, truly Dot!

"'OH, *WHAT* IS YOUR NAME?'"

She says that is her name, and she looks exactly like Molly. Oh, do come and see her!"

She wanted to rush back to the child with the news that she knew her sister Molly and that they should soon be together, but the nurse said it would excite her too much if it were really so. Then she wanted to send a telegram to Molly and a cable to Betty saying that Dot had been found, but nobody except herself was sure that this little Dot was Molly's sister.

"We must be absolutely sure of that first," said Mrs. Sherman, who saw the same strong resemblance to Molly that had startled the Little Colonel, but who knew how often such resemblances exist between entire strangers. "Think how cruel it would be to raise any false hopes in either one. Think how sure Elise was that the child she followed was Molly's sister. You both couldn't be right, for this one was brought to the hospital before Elise was lost."

The nurse could tell very little. The child had been picked up on the street so ill that she was delirious, and all their investigating had proved little beyond the fact that she had been deserted by her drunken father. Her illness was evidently caused by lack of proper food and clothing. Nobody knew her by any other name than Muggins.

While they were still discussing the matter in the hall, Allison had a bright idea. "Why couldn't you telephone for Ranald to bring his camera and take a picture of her and send that to Molly If she says it is Dot that will settle it."

The nurse thought that would be a sensible thing to do, but they had to wait until one of the doctors was consulted. As soon as he gave his permission, they began to make arrangements. Ranald answered his mother's summons promptly, and it was not long before he was setting up his tripod in the room where the child lay.

A pleased smile came over the child's face when she discovered what was to be done. "Put in all the things that have made me so happy while I have been in the hospital," she said to the nurse, "so that when I leave here I can have the picture of them to look at."

So they laid a big wax doll in her arms, that had been her constant companion, and around her on the counterpane they spread the games and pictures she had played with before she grew so weak. On her pillow was the queen-rose, and close beside the bed they wheeled the little table that held a plate of white grapes and oranges. Just as Ranald was ready to take the picture, the matron came in with a plate of

ice-cream. "Oh, put that in, too," cried Muggins "Miss Hale sends it every day, and it's one of the happiest things to remember about the hospital. It is like heaven, isn't it?" she exclaimed, glancing around at the luxuries she had never known until she came to the hospital, and that smile was on her face when Ranald took the picture.

"I'll develop it as soon as I get home, and print one for you this afternoon," he promised. "You shall have one to-morrow."

"Will you print me one, too?" inquired the Little Colonel, anxiously, when they had bidden Muggins good-bye, and were going through the hall. "I want one to send to Betty and Eugenia, and one to send to Joyce, and one to keep."

"I'll print a dozen next week if you want them," promised Ranald, "but the first one must be for that little Dot or Muggins, or whatever you call her, and the next one for Molly."

It was Mrs. Sherman who wrote the letter that carried the picture to Molly. By the same mail there went a note to Mrs. Appleton, saying that in case Molly recognised it as her sister, they would send for her to come and spend Christmas with her in the hospital, for the nurse had said it would probably be the child's last Christmas, and they

wanted to do all they could to make it a happy one.

In a few days the answer came. Molly was almost wild with joy, and would start as soon as the promised railroad ticket reached her. The photograph of little Dot was scarcely out of her hands, Mrs. Appleton said. She propped it up in front of her while she washed the dishes. It lay in her lap when she was at the table, and at night she slept with it under her pillow to bring her happy dreams.

The day that Mrs. Appleton's letter came, Allison went up to her mother's room and stood beside her desk waiting for her pen to come to the end of a page. "Mamma," she said, as Mrs. Walton finally looked up, "I've thought of such a nice plan. Have you time to listen?"

Mrs. Walton smiled up at the thoughtful face of her eldest daughter. "You should have been named Pansy, my dear. *Pensee* is for thought, you know, and I'm glad to say you are always having thoughts of some sensible way to help other people. I'm very busy, but I am sure your plan is a good one, so I'll let the letters wait for awhile."

She leaned back in her chair, and Allison, dropping down on the rug at her feet, began eagerly. "Out at the hospital, mamma, there is a little empty room

at the end of a side hall. It is a dear little room with a fireplace and a sunny south window. It has never been furnished because they haven't enough money. I asked one of the nurses about it, and she said they often need it for cases like Dot. It would be so much pleasanter to have her away from all the noise. And I've been thinking if it could be fixed up for Dot to spend Christmas in, how much nicer it would be for her and Molly both. It wouldn't cost very much to furnish it, just enough to get the little white bedroom set and the sheets and towels and things. Anyhow, it wouldn't be much more than you've often spent on my Christmas presents. And I wanted to know if you wouldn't let me do that this year instead of your giving me a Christmas present. Please, mamma, I've set my heart on it. If I got books they'd soon be read, and jewelry or games I'd get tired of after awhile, and things to wear, no matter how pretty, would be worn out soon. But this is something that would last for years. I could think every day that some poor little soul who has never known anything but to be sick or sad was enjoying my pretty room."

"That is as beautiful a *pensee* as ever blossomed in any heart-garden, I am sure," said Mrs. Walton, softly, smoothing the curly head resting against her knee, "and mother is glad that her little girl's plans

are such sweet unselfish ones. We'll go this very afternoon and talk to the matron about it."

Aladdin's lamp is not the only thing that can suddenly bring wonderful things to pass. There is a modern magic of telephones and electric cars, and the great Genii of sympathy and good-will are all-powerful when once unbottled. So a few hours wrought wonderful changes in the empty little room, and next morning Allison stood in the centre of it looking around her with delighted eyes.

Everything was as white and fresh as a snowdrop, from the little bed to the dainty dressing-table beside the window. A soft firelight shone on the white-tiled hearth of the open fireplace. The morning sun streamed in through the wide south window, where a pot of pink hyacinths swung its rosy bells, and Allison's Japanese canary, Nagasaki, twittered in its gilded cage. She had brought it all the way from Japan.

"Of course they won't want it in the room all the time," she said, "but there will be days when the children will love to have it brought in a little while to sing to them."

"If you give up Nagasaki then I'll give my globe of goldfish," said Kitty, anxious to do her part toward making a happy time for little Dot. "After-

ward, if the child who stays in that room is too sick to enjoy it, it can go into the convalescent ward."

It was into this room that Molly came, bringing her picture of the Good Shepherd She had carried it in her arms all the way, frequently taking it out of its brown paper wrapping, for down in one corner of the frame she had fastened the photograph of Dot.

All that morning on the train, the refrain that had gone through her happy heart as she looked at the picture was, "Oh, she's been happy for a month! She's got grapes and oranges, and a doll, and roses in the picture, and *ice-cream!* And there's lace on her nightgown, and she is *smiling*."

"Shall we name the room for you, Miss Allison?" asked the nurse, when the picture of the Good Shepherd was hung over the mantel, and Dot lay looking up at it with tired eyes, her little hand clasped in Molly's, and a satisfied smile on her face.

"No," whispered Allison, her glance following the gaze of the child's eyes. "Call it *The Fold of the Good Shepherd.* She looks like a poor little lost lamb that had just found its way home."

"I wish all the poor little stray lambs might find as warm a shelter," answered the nurse, in an undertone, "and I hope, my dear, that all your Christmases will be as happy as the one you are making for her."

CHAPTER XV.

A HAPPY CHRISTMAS.

THERE was a fortnight's vacation at Christmas time. Lloyd spent nearly all the week before in town, and not once in all that time did it occur to her to wonder what she might find in her own stocking. She was too busy helping get the little trees ready for the children in the hospital.

There were twenty of them, each one complete, with starry tapers and glittering ornaments, with red-cheeked candy apples, and sugar animals hung by the neck; with tiny tarlatan stockings of bonbons, with festoons of snowy popcorn, and all that goes to make up the Christmas trees that are the dearest memories of childhood. And somewhere, hidden among the branches of each one, or lying at its base, was the especial book or toy or game that its owner had been known to long for.

"I believe that Molly and Dot would rather have theirs together," said Allison. "As they are in a

room by themselves we can give them as large a one as we please, and the others will never know it."

So it was a good-sized tree that was set aside for "The Fold." The very prettiest of the ornaments were put with it; the brightest coloured candles, and at the top was fastened a glittering Christmas angel and a shining Christmas star.

It was not till the day before Christmas that they began to think of their own affairs. Then Kitty brought out four stockings, which the Little Colonel examined with interest. They were long and wide, with tiny sleigh-bells on the top, the heels, and the toes, that jingled musically at the slightest movement. Two were pink and two were blue. What charmed Lloyd the most were the fascinating pictures printed on them. They told the whole story of Christmas.

Holly and mistletoe and Christmas trees were on one side, down which ran a road where pranced the reindeer with the magic sleigh, driven by jolly old Santa Claus himself. On the other side of the stocking was the picture of the fireplace and a row of stockings hanging from the mantel. In a cradle near by lay a baby asleep. Down on the toe was printed in fancy letters:

"Hang up the baby's stocking,
Be sure and don't forget.
The dear little dimpled darling
Has never seen Christmas yet."

"We hang them up every year," explained Kitty. "Ranald and all of us. It wouldn't seem like Christmas if we used any other kind. We had them in Washington and at every army post we've lived at, and they've been around the world with us. If they could talk they could tell of more good times than any other stockings in the world."

"Um! I just *love* mine!" cried Elise, catching hers up with a caressing squeeze, and then swinging it around her head until every little bell was set a-jingling musically. A little while later she said, with a serious face, "I don't s'pose Molly and Dot ever saw a beautiful picture stocking like this. Do you? Gifts seem so much nicer when they come out of it than out of the common kind that I believe I'll lend them mine this year. I know what it is to be lost, you know. I'm so glad that I was found that I'd like to do something to show how thankful I am about it."

"But how will Santa Claus know it's to be filled for them?" asked Kitty. "He has always filled it

for you, and he might put your things in it, and they'd get them."

"I could pin a note on it saying it was mine, but to please put their things in it this one time," said Elise, with a troubled look, as she went over to the window to consider the matter by herself.

A little while later she carried her stocking to her mother with this note pinned to it:

"DEAR SANTA CLAUS: — This is my stocking. I s'pose you'll recognise it, as I've carried it around the world with me, and you have put lots of pretty things in it for me every year since I was born. But this year please put Molly's and Dot's presents in it, and I shall be a million times obliged to you.

"Your loving little friend,

"ELISE WALTON."

"But what will you do, little one?" asked Mrs. Walton.

"Hang up one of my blue silk stockings," said Elise, promptly, as she danced around the room, jingling the bells on heel and toe in time to a gay little tune of her own.

Lloyd would not have missed taking part in the Christmas celebration at the hospital for anything, yet she could not give up her usual custom of hanging her stocking beside the old fireplace at Locust. So, in order to give her both pleasures, it was finally

decided that the trees should be taken to the hospital at dusk on Christmas eve, and she could go home afterward on the nine o'clock train.

Malcolm and Keith were having a great celebration out at Fairchance for Jonesy and all who had been gathered into the home since its founding. Miss Allison was helping them, and could not go into town, much to the disappointment of the girls.

"I wish that auntie was twins," said Kitty, mournfully. "Then she could be in both places at once. The boys are always wanting her whenever we do."

"Your auntie helped with the celebration last year at the hospital, Kitty-cat," said her mother, "so it is only fair that they should have her in the country this year."

"But Malcolm and Keith were with her both times," persisted Kitty, jealously. "I think that it is just too bad that she isn't twins."

Rob and Ranald went with the girls to help distribute the trees. It seemed as if a tiny forest had been carried out of fairyland and set in long, glittering rows down the sides of the wards. One twinkled and bloomed beside each little white bed. The children did not stay long in the wards. They were more interested in the little room at the end of

the hall, — Allison's room, that was known all over the building now as "The Fold of the Good Shepherd." The room where two little sisters lost from each other so long, but brought together at last, lived through the happy hours, hand in hand.

Molly's face had lost every trace of its old sullen pout, and fairly shone with contentment as she sat by Dot's bed, smoothing her pillow, feeding her from time to time as the nurse directed, and singing softly when the tired eyes drooped wearily to sleep.

"She would make a fine nurse," said the matron to Mrs. Walton. "She is strong and patient, and seems to have so much sense about what to do for a sick person. Usually we wouldn't think of letting anybody come in as she is doing, but she minds the nurse's slightest nod, and seems to be doing Dot more good than medicine."

It had cost Elise a pang to give up her cherished stocking even as a loan, but she was more than repaid by the pleasure it gave the child, who had known no Christmas story and none of its joy since she had been large enough to remember.

They went back to their homes as soon afterward as possible, Lloyd to hang up her stocking at Locust, and the children to put theirs by the library fire. One plain little blue one hung among the gay pic-

tured ones, no mistletoe upon it, no holly, no jingling bells, no printed rhymes; but as Mrs. Walton gathered Elise's little white gowned form in her arms, she repeated something that made the child look up wonderingly.

"Oh, mamma!" she cried. "Does it mean that the little Christ-child counts it just the same — my lending the stocking to Dot and Molly — as if I had loaned it to him?"

"Just the same, little one."

"And he is glad?" She asked the question in an awed whisper.

"I am sure he is; far gladder than they."

Somehow the thought that she had really brought joy to the Christ-child made more music in her heart that Christmas eve than all the tinkling of the tiny Christmas bells.

It would take too long to tell of all the good times that filled the happy holiday. At Fairchance it was a sight worth travelling miles to see, — those merry little lads, and the two little knights who had gone so far in their trying to "right the wrong and follow the king." At Locust Lloyd spent a happy day in a bewilderment of gifts, for besides all that she found in her overflowing stocking were the packages from Joyce and Eugenia and Betty. There was a new

saddle for Tarbaby from her grandfather, and a silver collar from Rob for his frisky namesake, with "Bob" engraved on the clasp. All day there were woolly little heads popping into the hall to say "Chris'mus gif', Miss Lloyd." And then white eyeballs would shine and snowy teeth gleam as she handed out the candy and nuts and oranges reserved for such calls. Every old black mammy or uncle who had ever worked on the place, every little pickaninny who could find the slightest claim, visited the great house at some time during the day for a share of its holiday cheer.

In the Walton household there was a chattering in the library long before sunrise, for Kitty, impatient to see what was in her stocking, had stolen down when the clock struck five, and the other girls had followed in her wake. "I got fourteen presents," said Kitty, chattering back to bed in the gray dawn, after a blissful examination of her stocking.

"So did I," said Elise. "Everything in the world that I wanted, and lots of things I'd never dreamed of getting, besides. Auntie and Aunt Elise always think of such lovely things."

Allison's gifts did not make such a brave showing when spread out with the others, but she thought of the little white room at the hospital with a warm

glow in her heart that was worth more than all the gifts that money could buy. Down in the toe of her stocking she found a box from her Aunt Allison, and took it back to bed with her to open. Inside the jeweller's cotton was a little enamelled pansy of royal purple and gold, and in the centre sparkled a tiny diamond like a drop of dew. "Mamma must have told her," thought Allison, as she read the greeting written on the card with it. "For my dear little namesake. May your whole lifetime blossom with such beautiful thoughts for others as has made this Christmas day a joy."

Out at the hospital, as the day went by, Dot sat with her hand in Molly's, looking from time to time with eyes that never lost their expression of content, at the angel and the star that crowned the tree. She grew weaker and weaker as the hours passed, but, opening her eyes now and then, she smiled at Molly, and squeezed her hand, and looked again from the gay stocking hanging on the foot of her bed to the shining angel atop of the tree.

The Japanese canary twittered in his cage; the goldfish flashed around and around in their sunny globe; the deep red roses on the table bloomed as if it were June-time. Outside there was snow and ice

and winter winds. Inside it was all cheer and comfort and peace that happy Christmas Day.

Mrs. Walton and the girls came down again in the twilight. Dot was too weak to say much, but she asked Mrs. Walton to sing, and wanted the tapers lighted again on the tree. Thoughtful Allison had brought fresh ones with her, which she soon fastened in place. And so, presently, with only the soft firelight in the room, and the starlight of the little Christmas candles, Mrs. Walton began an old tune that she loved. Her beautiful voice had sung it in many a hospital, in the cheerless tents of many a camp. Many a brave soldier, dying thousands of miles away from home, had been soothed and comforted by it. It was "My Ain Countrie" she sang. Not the sweet old Scotch words, with the breath of the moors and the scent of the heather in them, that she loved. She changed them so that the child could understand. Dot opened her eyes and looked up at the picture of the Good Shepherd, hanging over the mantel, as she sang:

"'For he gathers in his bosom all the helpless lambs like me,
And he takes them where he's going, to my own country.'"

There was silence for a moment, and Dot asked suddenly, "Will everything there be as lovely as

it is here in the hospital?" When Mrs. Walton nodded yes, she added, with a long, fluttering sigh, "Oh, I've been so happy here. I don't see how heaven could be any nicer. Sing some more, please."

She fell asleep a little later to the soothing refrain of an old lullaby, and never knew when her guests slipped out, with a whispered good night to Molly.

An hour went by. The Christmas tapers burned lower and lower, and finally went out, one by one, till there was left only the one above the angel and the star. The fire flickered on the hearth, but Molly did not rise to replenish it, for the little hand held hers, and she did not want to waken such sweet sleep. The nurse looked in at the door once or twice, and slipped out again. Nagasaki, curled up like a feather ball, with his head under his wing, stirred once, with a sleepy twitter, but no other sound broke the stillness of the little room.

Again the door opened softly, and the doctor stepped in on his round of evening visits. He laid his finger on the little one's pulse a moment, and then turned away. The last taper on the tree, that lit the star, glowing above the Christmas angel, gave a final flicker and went out. The doctor, stepping into the hall, met one of the nurses.

"THE LITTLE HAND HELD HERS."

"You'll have to tell her sister," he said. "She is still holding the little one's hand, thinking that she is asleep. But her life went out with the last of the Christmas candles."

It was not until next day that the children heard what had happened the evening before. The matron had telephoned immediately to Mrs. Walton, but she did not tell the children, or send word to Locust, until next morning. She did not want a single shadow to rest on their glad Christmas Day.

"I do not believe in taking children to funerals," she said to her sister Elise, "but death seems so beautiful in this instance that I want them to see it."

The reception-room at the hospital had been fitted up like a chapel. An altar, draped in white, was covered with flowers, and before it stood the white casket where Dot's frail little body was tenderly tucked away for its last sleep.

All of the children were there; the two little knights, with a sweet seriousness in their handsome faces, wearing in their buttonholes Aunt Allison's badge, the pin that was to remind them that they were trying to wear, also, "the white flower of a blameless life."

The little captain stood beside them, thinking, as he looked at the little body the saloons had killed (for nothing but the cruelty and neglect of a drunken father had caused Dot's illness and death), that there were battles to fight for his country at home, as well as those on foreign fields. The manly little shoulders squared themselves with a grave resolution to wear whatever duty the future might lay upon them, in warfare against evil, as worthily as he had worn the epaulets in far-away Luzon.

Allison and Kitty and Elise were there, and the Little Colonel, all strongly moved by the unusual scene. It was a very short and simple service. The late afternoon sun shone in aslant through the western window, like a wide bar of gold. The minister read the parable of the ninety and nine, and repeated the burial service. Then there was a prayer, and Miss Allison, seating herself at the organ, touched the keys in soft chords for Mrs. Walton to sing. She sung the lullaby that Dot had asked for the night before; the cradle-song of hundreds of happy home-sheltered children:

"'Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me,
Bless thy little lamb to-night.
Through the darkness be thou near me,
Keep me safe till morning light.

"'Let my sins be all forgiven,
Bless the friends I love so well,
Take me when I die to heaven,
Happy there with thee to dwell.'"

When it was all over they filed softly out into the corridor, feeling that they had only said good night to little Dot, and that it was good that one so tired and worn should find such deep and restful sleep. It was not at all like what they had imagined dying to be.

"Even Molly didn't cry," said Kitty, wonderingly, as they went home together in the twilight.

"No," said Mrs. Walton, "she said to me that she had done all her crying in those dreadful years when they were separated. She said, 'Oh, Mrs. Walton, now that I know that she's comfortable and happy, I can't feel so bad about her as I used to. She's so safe, now. No matter what happens, the saloons can't hurt her, now. There'll be no more hungry days, no more beatings, and it will always be such a comfort to me to think she had such a good time in the hospital. For six weeks she had plenty to eat, and everybody was good to her. Every time I look at her picture, I think of that. She had white grapes and roses even in the winter-time, and she had *ice-cream!* All she wanted. And I made up my mind this morning that when I'm old enough I am going

to be a trained nurse and help take care of poor little children the way she was taken care of here. Miss Agnes says she can find room for me right away, for there's all sorts of things that I can do, and I'd love to do it for my poor little Dot's sake.'"

"I must write that to Betty," thought the Little Colonel. "That is the most beautiful way of all to build a Road of the Loving Heart."

She thought of it all the way home, as the train sped on through the wintry fields, between snow-covered fences. It was dark when the brakeman called "Lloydsboro Valley," but Walker was waiting with the carriage, and they were soon driving in at the great entrance gate.

"Oh, mothah," said the Little Colonel, nestling closer under the warm carriage robes. "See how the stars shine through the locust-trees, and how the light streams out from the house, down the avenue to meet us! Somehow, no mattah how happy the holidays are, it always seems so good to get home."

CHAPTER XVI.

A PEEP INTO THE FUTURE.

"AND what happened next?"

Ah, that I cannot tell you, for the rest of the story is yet to be lived. Only the swineherd's magic caldron can give you a glimpse into the future.

Gather around it, all you curious little princes and princesses, and thrust your fingers into the steam as the water bubbles and the bells begin again. I cannot tell what it will show you. Glimpses of college life, perhaps, and gay vacation times, as Rob and the captain and the two little knights leave their boyhood days behind them and grow up into manly young fellows, ready to take the places waiting for them in the world.

Perhaps there will be college days and gay vacation times for the girls, too, with white commencement gowns and diplomas and June roses. And away off in the distance there may be the sound of wedding bells ringing for them all, but if it is too far for

the kettle to catch the echo of their chiming, surely *I* have no right to tell.

But no matter what the kettle may show, or what it fails to disclose, you may be sure of this, that none who ever played under the Locusts with the Little Colonel forgot the pleasure of those merry playtimes. And all who shared her joy in finding little Dot were better and more helpful ever after, because of what happened that Christmas-tide, the happiest of all the Little Colonel's holidays.

THE END.

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